

A DECADE OF FANTASY AND

SELECTED BY
ROBERT P. MILLS

SCIENCE

FICTION



DOUBLEDAY SCIENCE FICTION

A DECADE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Selected by Robert P. Mills

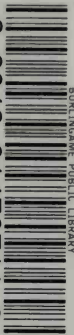
The first issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* appeared in 1949 and the annual collection of the best from that magazine quickly established itself as the finest in the world. For its tenth anniversary, the distinguished editor-in-chief of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Robert P. Mills, has chosen twenty-five of the best stories from the last ten years—none of which has appeared in the previous nine annuals.

The stories range from the wryly humorous to the deadly serious, from the purely ingenious to the downright sinister. Included in the list of top-notch authors are: Graham Greene, John Masefield, Anthony Boucher, Poul Anderson, Howard Fast, Isaac Asimov, Theodore Sturgeon, Ogden Nash, Alfred Bester, and Oliver La Farge. *A Decade of Fantasy and Science Fiction* is a superb collection of stories, all told by masters of their craft.

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*A Decade of Fantasy
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A DECADE
OF
FANTASY
AND
SCIENCE FICTION

selected by Robert J. Miller

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Magazine of

A DECADE
OF
FANTASY
AND
SCIENCE FICTION

selected by Robert P. Mills

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Introduction

Since Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas, as co-editors, brought out the first issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in the fall of 1949, there have been nine annual collections in book form taken from the magazine's pages. Each year the problem of selecting the stories to be included in the book has been at the least tantalizing, and often very nearly defeating; each year, stories that demanded to be in had to be excluded for artificial reasons having to do with length, balance of fantasy with science fiction, and the like. In recent years, the problem has been somewhat modified by the adoption of a policy which arbitrarily eliminates reprints—which means that many a distinguished story has had to be passed by.

This volume has the specific purpose of rectifying the omissions of the past—and we confess that assembling it has again presented the familiar problem. Many stories not included in our annual volumes are not present because they have since appeared in other anthologies readily available in libraries and bookstores; nonetheless, the number of likely candidates which are left out simply because there is no room here would fill another book as large as this one.

A final note: what is good in this book is almost entirely owing to the work of Messrs. Boucher and McComas, who conceived the idea of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and gave it its special character. It is extremely regrettable that Mr. McComas had to resign for personal reasons after the first few years, and Mr. Boucher after nine years. The incumbent of the editorial chair salutes them.

ROBERT P. MILLS

Norwalk, Conn.

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One of a series of stories "satirizing one or another aspect of man's mortality," written especially for *Fantasy and Science Fiction* by the author of *Citizen Tom Paine*, *Spartacus*, and many distinguished others.

The Martian Shop

by Howard Fast

These are the background facts given to Detective Sergeant Tom Bristol when he was instructed to break down the door and go into the place. It is true that the locksmiths at Centre Street have earned the reputation of being able to open anything that has been closed; and that reputation is not undeserved. But this door was an exception. So Bristol went to break down the door with two men in uniform and crowbars and all the other tools that might be necessary. But before that he studied a precis of the pertinent facts.

It had been established that three stores had been opened on the same day and the same hour; and more than that, as an indication of a well-organized and orderly mind, the space for each of the stores had been rented on the same day, the leases signed on the same hour. The store in Tokyo was located in the very best part of the Ginza. The space had been occupied by a fine jewelry and watchmaking establishment, perhaps the second or third best in all Japan; they vacated the premises, refusing to give the press any explanation whatsoever at the time. Later, however, it was revealed that the price paid to the jewelry establishment for the purchase of its lease consisted of fifty diamonds of exactly three carats each, all of them so perfectly matched, so alike in their flawlessness, that diamond experts consider the very existence of the collection—hitherto unknown—to be a unique event in the long history of jewels.

The store in Paris was, of course, on Faubourg St. Honoré. There were no stores vacant at the time, and the lease of a famous cou-

turier was purchased for forty million francs. The couturier (his name is omitted at specific request of the French government) named the price facetiously, for he had no intention of surrendering his place. When the agent for the principal wrote out a check on the spot, holding him to his word, he had no choice but to go through with the deal.

The third store was on Fifth Avenue in New York City. After thirty years on the Avenue, the last ten increasingly unprofitable, the old and stodgy firm of Delbos gave up its struggle against modern merchandising. The store it had occupied was located on the block between 52nd and 53rd Streets, on the east side of the street. The property itself was managed by Clyde and Abrahams, who were delighted to release Delbos from a twenty-five year lease that had been signed in 1937, and who promptly doubled the rent. The Slocum Company, acting as agents for the principals—who never entered into the arrangements at all, either with Clyde and Abrahams or subsequently with Trevore, the decorating firm—made no protest over the increased rent, signed the lease, and then paid a year's rent in advance. Arthur Lewis, one of the younger partners in the Slocum Company, conducted the negotiations. Wally Clyde of Clyde and Abrahams, remarked at the time that the Slocum Company was losing its grip. Lewis shrugged and said that they were following instructions; he said that if he had bargaining power himself, he would be damned before he ever agreed to such preposterous rent.

Lewis also conducted the negotiations with Trevore, turning over to them detailed plans for the redesigning and decoration of the store, and agreeing to the price they set. He did make it plain, however, that his specific instructions from his principal were to agree to all prices asked and to deal only with the firms he was told to deal with. He pointed out to Trevore that such practices were abhorrent to the Slocum Company and were not to be anticipated under any circumstances in the future.

When the information for this precis was gathered, Mr. Samuel Carradine of the Trevore Company produced the original plans for the remodeling and decoration of the store, that is the plans

turned over to him by Mr. Lewis. They are hand-drawn on a fine but strong paper of pale yellow tint. Two paper experts, one of them chief chemist for Harlin Mills, have already examined these plans, but they are unable to identify the paper, nor have they seen similar paper before. They do assert that the paper has neither a pulp nor a rag base. Part of the paper is at present undergoing chemical analysis at Crestwood Laboratories.

From this point onward, the history of the three stores is sufficiently general for the data on the Fifth Avenue store to suffice. In all three cases, rental and alteration were managed under similar circumstances; in all three cases the subsequent progress of events was the same, making due allowance for the cultural patterns of each country. In each case, the decoration of the store was in excellent taste, unusual, but nevertheless artfully connected with the general decor of the particular avenue.

Trevore charged over a hundred thousand dollars for alteration and decoration. The storefront was done in stainless steel panels, used as tile. Window-space was enlarged, and a magnificent bronze-veneered door replaced the ancient oak portal of Delbos. The interior was done in tones of black and crimson, with drapes and carpeting of mustard yellow, and the display cases and platforms were of bronze and glass. Decorators whose opinions have been sought all concur in the assessment of results. Without doubt the three stores were done in excellent, if not superb, taste—the decoration bold, unique, but never vulgar or distressing. It must be noted, however, that Mr. Ernest Searles, who heads the decor department of the Fifth Avenue Association, pointed out certain angular—that is, unfamiliar degree angles—concepts never used before by American decorators.

On Fifth Avenue, as in the other cases, the center focus of the decorating scheme was the crystal replica of the Planet Mars, which was suspended from the ceiling in each shop, and which revolved at the same tempo as Mars itself. It has not yet been determined what type of mechanism activates these globes. The globes, which display a unique and remarkable map of Mars' sur-

face, were installed by the principals, after Trevore had completed the overall alteration and decoration. While the Fifth Avenue storefront is striking, it was done with the type of expensive modesty that would do credit to Tiffany's. The last thing installed was the name of the shop itself, MARS PRODUCTS, in gold letters, each letter a half-inch in relief and five inches high. It has since been determined that these letters are cast out of solid gold.

The three shops opened their doors to the public at ten A.M., on the tenth of March—in local time and day. In New York, the letters spelling out MARS PRODUCTS had been displayed for eight days, and a good deal of curiosity had been aroused, both among the public and the press. But until actual opening, no information had been offered.

During those days, four objects had been on display in the shop windows. No doubt the reader of this precis has seen or examined these objects, each of which stood upon a small crystal display stand, framed in black velvet, for all the world like precious jewels, which in a sense they were. The display consisted of a clock, an adding machine, an outboard motor and a music box, although only the clock was recognizable through its appearance, a beautiful precision instrument, activated as a number of clocks are by the variation in atmospheric pressure. Yet the workmanship, materials and general beauty of this clock outdid anything obtainable in the regular market.

The adding machine was a black cube, measuring slightly more than six inches. The covering is of some as yet undetermined synthetic or plastic, inlaid with the curious hieroglyphs that have come to be known as the Martian script, the hieroglyphs in white and gold. This machine is quickly and easily adjusted or sensitized to the sound of an individual voice, and it calculates on the basis of vocal instruction. The results emerge through a thin slit in the top, printed on paper similar to that mentioned before. Theoretically, such a calculator could be built today, but, so far as we know, by only two shops, one in Germany and the other in Japan, and the cost would be staggering; certainly, it would take years of experimental work to develop it to the point where it would deal with

thirteen digits, adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing entirely by vocal command.

The outboard motor was an object about the size of a small electric sewing machine, fabricated of some blue metal and weighing fourteen pounds, six ounces and a fraction. Two simple tension clips attached it to any boat or cart or car. It generated forty horsepower in jet propulsion, and it contained, almost microcosmically, its own atomic generator, guaranteed for one thousand continuous hours of operation. Through a muffling device, which has so far defied even theoretical solution, it produced less sound than an ordinary outboard motor. In each shop, this was explained, not as a muffling procedure, but as a matter of controlled pitch beyond the range of the human ear. Competent engineers felt that this explanation must be rejected.

In spite of the breathtaking implications of this atomic motor, it was the music box that excited the most attention and speculation. Of more or less the same dimensions as the adding machine, it was of pale yellow synthetic, the hieroglyphs pricked out in dark gray. Two slight depressions on the top of this box activated it, a slight touch of one depression to start it, a second touch on the same depression to stop it. The second depression, when touched, changed the category of the music desired. There were twenty-two categories of music available—symphonic music in three chronological sections, chamber music in three sections, piano solo, violin solo with and without accompaniment, folk music for seven cultures, operatic in three sections, orchestra, full cast and orchestra, that is the complete opera, and selected renderings, religious music, divided into five religious categories, popular songs in national sections, instrumental music in terms of eighty-two instruments, jazz in five categories and three categories of children's music.

The salespeople in each of the three shops claimed that the music box had a repertoire of eleven thousand and some odd separate musical selections, but this, of course, could not be put to the test, and varying opinions on this score have been expressed. Also the use of vocal instruction to set the sound and pitch—which was not

inferior to the best mass-produced high fidelity—was pooh-poohed as fakery. But Mr. Harry Flannery, consulting sound engineer for the Radio Corporation of America, has stated that the music box could be compiled out of available technical knowledge, especially since the discovery of transistor electronics. As with the adding machine, it was less the technical achievement than the workmanship that was unbelievable. But Mr. Flannery admitted that a content of eleven thousand works was beyond present day knowledge or skill, providing that this enormous repertoire was a fact. From all witnesses interrogated, we have compiled a list of more than three hundred works played by the shop's demonstration music box.

These were the four objects displayed in the windows of each of the three stores. The same four objects were available for examination and demonstration inside each of the stores. The clock was priced at \$500, the adding machine at \$475, the outboard motor at \$1620 and the music box at \$700—and these prices were exactly the same, at the current exchange, in Tokyo and Paris.

Prior to the opening—that is, the previous day—quarter-page advertisements, in the *New York Times* only, stated simply and directly that the people of the Planet Mars announced the opening, the following day, of a shop on Fifth Avenue, which would display, demonstrate, and take orders for four products of Martian industry. It explained the limited selection of offerings by pointing out that this was only an initial step, in order to test the reactions of Earth buyers. It was felt, the advertisement stated, that commercial relations between the Earth and Mars should be on the friendliest basis, and the Martian industrialists had no desire to upset the economic balance of Earth.

The advertisement went on to say that orders would be taken for all of the products, and that delivery was guaranteed in twelve days. The advertisement expressed the hope that this would mark the beginning of a cordial and fruitful and lasting relationship between the inhabitants of both planets.

This advertisement was hardly the first word in the press concerning the Martian shops. Already, every columnist had carried an

item or two about what was, without question, one of the most imaginative and novel publicity schemes of the space age. Several columnists had it on the best authority—for rumors were all over the city—that General Dynamics was behind the Martian shops. They were also credited to General Electric, the Radio Corporation, and at least a dozen of large industrial enclaves. Again, a brilliant young merchandiser was named, a Paris dress designer, and a Greek shipping magnate. Still others spoke of a scheme by German industrialists to break into the American market in force, and of course there were hints that the Soviet Union was behind the method of destroying capitalism. Engineers were willing to grant Russia the skill, but interior decorators refused to acknowledge the ability of the Russians to produce original and tasteful decor. But until the shops actually opened and the working capabilities of the machines were actually demonstrated, no one was inclined to take the matter too seriously.

On the tenth of March, the shops opened in each of the three cities. The tenth of March was a Monday in New York. The shops remained open until Friday, and then they closed down for good—so far as we know.

But in those five days, thousands of people crowded into the Fifth Avenue store. The machines were demonstrated over and over. Thousands of orders were taken, but all deposits and prepayment were refused. The New York shop was staffed by one man and five tall, charming and efficient women. What they actually looked like is a matter of dispute, for they all wore skin-tight face masks of some latex-like material; but rather than to make them repulsive, the effect of the masks was quite pleasant. Gloves of the same material covered their hands, nor was any part of their skin anywhere exposed.

John Mattson, writing in the *News* the following day, said, "Never did the inhabitants of two planets meet under more promising circumstances. Having seen the Martian figure and having had a touch of the Martian charm, I am willing to take any chances with the Martian face. Uncover, my lovelies, uncover. Earth waits with bated breath."

Professor Hugo Elligson, the famous astronomer, visited the shop for *Life*. His report says in part, "If the masked people in this shop are Martians, then I say, Space must be conquered. I know it is strange for an astronomer to dwell on shapely legs and muted, rippling accents, yet I know that from here on my wife will eye me strangely whenever I look at the Red Planet. As to the relationship of an excellent publicity scheme to the Planet Mars, common intelligence orders me to withhold comment—"

Perhaps the Soviet Union thought different; for on the second day of the shop's business, two gentlemen from the Russian Embassy were known to enter and offer a cool million United States dollars for the demonstration sample of the atomic outboard. The Martians were polite but firm.

By Wednesday, Mars Products occupied more space in the New York press than international news. It crowded out the crises in the Middle East, and Formosa was relegated to page seventeen of the *Times*. A dozen authorities were writing scholarly opinions. Traffic on Fifth Avenue was impossible, and one hundred extra police were detailed to maintain order and make it possible for any of the Fifth Avenue stores to do business. The Fifth Avenue Association decided to apply for an injunction, on the grounds that Mars Products disrupted the ordinary practice of business.

Much the same was happening on Faubourg St. Honoré, and on the Ginza.

Also on Wednesday, American industry awoke and panicked. Boards of Directors were convened all over the nation. Important industrial magnates flew to Washington, and the stock of electronic, business-machine and automobile companies sent the Dow-Jones averages down twenty-six points. The largest builder of systems and calculating machines in America saw its stock sell ten minutes ahead of the ticker, down one hundred and eighty points for the day. So also on the London, Paris and Tokyo exchanges.

But the intelligence service was not perturbed until Thursday, when it sent formal requests to the F.B.I. and to the New York City Police Department to determine who and what the princi-

pals behind Mars Products were—and to ascertain where these machines had been manufactured, whether they had been imported, and whether duty had been paid. The Surete and the Tokyo Police were by then taking similar steps.

Without going into the details of this investigation, it suffices to say that in every case, the investigating authorities were baffled. All three bank accounts were the result of large cash deposits by very commonplace men who were no different from thousands of other average men. The acting agents were given, by mail, full power of attorney as well as instructions. The investigations were not completed until Friday evening.

By Friday, each of the three shops was under surveillance by various government and police agencies. In New York, city detectives put a twenty-four-hour watch on Mars Products Wednesday evening, even before any instructions or requests came from Washington. But no member of the staff left the shop after closing hours, or at any other time. Curtains were drawn across the windows, blocking off the display products. At 10 A.M., the curtains were drawn back.

During Friday, in New York and Washington, discussions were held on the advisability of issuing injunctions or search warrants. At the same time, there was understandable hesitancy. If this was a publicity scheme of some industrial group, whatever agency acted could be the laughing stock of the nation—as well as opening itself to considerable liability, if legal action was taken by the injured party. Plain-clothesmen had been in and out of the shop a hundred times, searching for some violation. None had been found. No loophole had been detected.

Friday night, the shop on Fifth Avenue closed as usual. The curtains were drawn. At eleven P.M., the lights went out. At three A.M., the door of the shop opened.

At that time on Saturday morning, Fifth Avenue was deserted. The shop was then being observed by four city detectives, two federal agents, two members of Central Intelligence, and three private operatives hired by the National Association of Manufac-

turers. The eleven men made no attempt at concealment. There was only one store entrance. Across the avenue, four cars waited.

When the door of Mars Products opened, the five members of the staff walked out. They all carried packages. At precisely the same moment, a large black automobile drew up at the curb in front of the shop. The man opened the back door of this car, and all five staff members entered. Then the door closed and they drove away. They were followed by the four cars. The agents who were watching them had instructions not to interfere, to make no arrests, but to follow any member of the staff to his or her destination and to report along the way by radio.

We have an exact description of the automobile. Shaped somewhat like a Continental, it was at least a foot longer, though no broader. It had a strange hood, more rounded than a stock car; but it was larger than any known sport car.

It headed uptown, well within the speed limits, turned into Central Park, emerged at Seventh Avenue and 110th Street, proceeded north and then beneath 155th Street to the Harlem River Speedway. When it reached the Speedway, two police cars had joined the caravan behind it. Toward the George Washington Bridge approach-ramp, it began to pick up speed, and when it passed the ramp, continuing on the deserted Speedway, it was already doing eighty miles an hour. The police cars opened their sirens, and by radio, additional police cars were instructed to set up a roadblock at Dyckman Street.

At that point, the black car put out wings, at least seven feet on either side, and went over to jet power. It left the pursuing cars as if they were standing still. It is impossible to arrive at any accurate estimate of its ground speed then, but it was certainly well over a hundred and thirty miles an hour. It was airborne in a matter of seconds, gained altitude quickly, and disappeared, by its sound, eastward. It was picked up twice by radar at an altitude of twenty thousand feet, moving at very high speed, even for jet power. The airforce was immediately notified and planes took off within minutes, but there is no report of the black car—or plane—being sighted again, nor was it again raised with radar.

It is sufficient to note that the progress of events in Tokyo and Paris was more or less identical. In no case was the staff of the shop interfered with or taken.

Such was the precis that Detective Sergeant Bristol reviewed before he went uptown to break in the door of Mars Products. It told him nothing that he did not already know, and in all truth, he knew a great deal more. His own specialty was *entry and search*, but like almost every other citizen of New York, he had speculated during the past days on the intriguing problem of Mars Products. He was well trained in the art of rejecting any conclusions not founded on facts he could test with sight, touch or smell; but in spite of this training, his imagination conjured up a host of possibilities behind the locked door of Mars Products. He was still young enough to view his work with excitement, and all during this day, his excitement had been mounting.

Both the city police and the F.B.I. had decided to wait through Saturday before opening the shop, and these decisions were communicated to Tokyo and Paris. Actually, the New York shop was opened a few hours later than the others.

When Bristol arrived at 52nd Street and Fifth Avenue, at least a dozen men were waiting for him. Among them were the police commissioner, the mayor, General Arlen Mack, the Chief of Staff, a colonel in Military Intelligence and several F.B.I. officials. There were also at least a hundred onlookers, held back by policemen. The police commissioner was irritated, and indicated that Bristol was the type to be late at his own funeral.

"I was told to be here at seven o'clock, sir," Bristol said. "It is still a few minutes before seven."

"Well, don't argue about it. Get that door open!"

It was easier said than done. When they ripped off the bronze plate, they found solid steel underneath. They burned through it and hammered off the bolted connection. It took almost an hour before the door was open—and then, as had been the case in Tokyo and Paris, they found the store empty. The beautiful crystal reproduction of the Planet Mars had been pulverized; they found

the shards in a waste basket, and it was taken to Centre Street for analysis. Otherwise, none of the decorations had been disturbed or removed, not even the solid gold letters on the store front—a small fortune in itself. But the eight products, the four from the window and the four used in the shop as demonstrators, were gone.

The high brass prowled around the place for an hour or so, examining the decorations and whispering to each other in corners. Someone made the inevitable remark about fingerprints, and the commissioner growled, "People whose skin is covered don't leave fingerprints." By nine o'clock, the brass had left, and Bristol went to work. Two F.B.I. men had remained; they watched the methods of the three men from Centre Street in silent admiration.

Bristol's specialty was, as we noted, *entry and search*. He had four children, a wife he adored, and he was soberly ambitious. He had long since decided to turn his specialty into a science and then to develop that science to a point unequaled elsewhere. First he brought in lights and flooded the store with three thousand additional watts of illumination. Since there was only the main room and a small office and lavatory behind it, he brightened the space considerably. Then he and his two assistants hooked portable lights onto their belts. He told the F.B.I. men:

"The first element of search is find it."

"Do you know what to look for?"

"No," Bristol said. "Neither does anyone else. That makes it easier in a way."

First they removed all drapery, spread white sheets, brushed the drapery carefully on both sides, folded it and removed it. The dust was collected and labeled. Then they swept all the floors, then went over them a second time with a vacuum cleaner. The dust was sifted, packaged and labeled. Then, fitting the vacuum cleaner with new bags each time, they went over every inch of space, floor, walls, ceiling, molding and furniture. Again, the bags were packaged and labeled. Then they took the upholstered furniture apart, bit by bit, shredding the fabric and filling. The foam rubber

in the cushions was needled and then picked apart. Once again, everything was labeled.

"This is more or less mechanical," Bristol explained to the government men. "Routine. We do the chemical and microscopic analysis downtown."

"Routine, eh?"

"I mean for this type of problem. We don't get this kind of problem in terms of search more than two or three times a year."

At two o'clock in the morning, the government men went out to buy coffee and sandwiches. They brought back a box of food for the city men. By four A.M., the carpeting had been taken down to Centre Street, the toilet walls stripped of tile, the plumbing removed and checked, the toilet and sink entirely dismantled. At six o'clock on Sunday morning, in the cold gray light of dawn, Bristol was supervising the taking apart of every piece of bonded wood or metal in the shop.

He made the find in a desk, a modern desk of Swedish design that had been supplied by the decorators. Its surface was of polished birch, and there was a teak strip across the front. When this strip was removed, Bristol found a bit of film, less than an inch long and about three millimeters in width. When he held it up to the light with tweezers and put a magnifying glass on it, it was discovered to be film strip. It contained sixteen full frames and part of a seventeenth frame.

Minutes later, he was in a car with the government men, racing down to Centre Street; and only then did he permit himself the luxury of a voiced opinion.

"They must have been editing that film," he remarked. "I have been reading how orderly and precise they are. But even an orderly person can lose something. Even a Martian," he finished doubtfully.

Strangely enough, the government men made no comment at all.

Bristol is remembered, and it has been said in many places that he will go far. He has already been promoted, and without ques-

tion he will be mentioned by historians for years to come. He was an honest and thorough man, and he had an orderly mind to match other orderly minds.

Professor Julius Goldman will also be remembered. The head of the Department of Semitic Languages at Columbia University, he was also the leading philologist in the Western Hemisphere, if not the world; and to him as much as to any other goes the credit for breaking through the early Cretan script. He pioneered the brilliant—if again failing—recent Etruscan effort. Along with Jacobs of Oklahoma, he is the leading authority on American Indian languages, specializing there in the Plains dialects. It is said that there is no important language on earth, living or dead, that he cannot command fluently.

This is possibly an exaggeration, but since he was reached by the White House that same Sunday, flown to Washington, put at the head of a team of five of the country's finest philologists—and since he accomplished what was expected of him in thirty-two hours, it might be said that his reputation was deserved.

Yet by the grace of God or whatever force determines our destiny, he was given a "Rosetta Stone," so to speak. Without it, as he was the first to point out, the Martian script would not have been broken, not now and possibly not ever. The "Rosetta Stone"—which, you will recall, originally enabled philologists to break the mystery of the Egyptian hieroglyphs by providing them, on the same stone tablet, with translations in known tongues—was in this case a single frame of the film strip, containing both an English and Martian inscription. Acting on the possibility that one was a translation of the other, Professor Goldman found an opening for the attack. Nevertheless, it remains perhaps the most extraordinary case of reconstruction in all the history of language.

That Tuesday, the Tuesday after the store had been broken into, the President of the United States held an enlarged meeting of his cabinet at the White House. In addition to the regular members of the cabinet, some forty-two other persons were present, Julius Goldman among them; and it was not Goldman alone who appeared haggard from want of sleep. Each of the men present had

a precis—somewhat enlarged—that was not too different from the one presented here. Each of them had read it and pondered it. Opening the meeting, the President reviewed the facts, mentioned some of the opinions already gathered from experts, and then said:

“What are we to think, gentlemen? Our own halting probes into outer space have removed the starry realm from the province of fiction writers and gullible fools. As yet we have no firm conclusions, but I do hope that at the end of this meeting, we will formulate a few and be able to act upon them. I need not repeat that some of the keenest minds in America still consider the Martian shops to be a remarkable hoax. If so, a practical joke costing its originator a great many millions of dollars, has been played out to no point. In all fairness, I reject this conclusion, nor can I, at this point in my knowledge, support any arguments that we have seen a great publicity campaign. I have come to certain conclusions of my own, but I shall withhold them until others have been heard.

“As most of you know, through the energy and resourcefulness of the New York City police department, we found a tiny bit of film strip at the Fifth Avenue shop. Nothing of any value was found either in Paris or Tokyo. Nevertheless, I have invited the Japanese and French ambassadors to be present tonight, since their countries have been chosen, even as ours was. I do not say that their interest is higher than that of other nations, for perhaps—”

The President hesitated then—and shrugged tiredly. “Well, at this point, I will turn the meeting over to Professor Julius Goldman of Columbia University, our greatest philologist, whose contribution to the unravelling of this problem cannot be overestimated.”

Professor Goldman said quietly that, for the record, he had made no contribution not shared equally by his colleagues, who were not present this evening. They had, all six of them, prepared an affidavit, which he would read in the name of the entire team.

First, he would like the people assembled to see the film strip for themselves.

The room was darkened. The first frame appeared on a prepared screen at one end of the room. It was covered with vertical lines of what had already come to be called the Martian Hieroglyphic. So with the second and the "Rosetta Stone." At the top, in English block letters:

"Compound for white males—16 to 19 years of age."

And directly beneath, again in English, "General warning. Any discussion of escape or resistance will be met by permanent stimulation of the tri-geminal nerve."

And beneath that, "Feeding room—yellow-skinned females, 7 to 10 years of age."

And as a final line in English, "Much have I travelled in the realms of gold."

Beneath these English lines were a number of vertical hieroglyph columns.

The voice of Professor Goldman explained, "This frame gave us our key, but we do not claim any clear knowledge of what these inscriptions mean. Medical authorities consulted have suggested that a certain type of irritation of the tri-geminal nerve can result in the most trying pain man knows. The line from Keats is utterly meaningless, so far as we can determine; the reason for its inclusion remains to be explained in the future, if ever. The remaining frames, as you see, are in the hieroglyph."

The lights went on again. Professor Goldman blinked tiredly, wiped his glasses, and said, "Before I present our affidavit, I must ask your indulgence for a few words concerning language. When we philologists claim to have cracked the mystery of some ancient tongue, we do not talk as a cryptographer who has broken a code. Philology and Cryptography are very different sciences. When a code is broken, its message is known. When a language is broken, only the first step in a long and arduous process is taken. No single man or single group of men has ever revealed an ancient language; that is an international task and must of necessity take generations to complete.

"I say this because perhaps your hopes have been raised too high. We have very little to work from, only a few words and numerals; we are dealing with an unrelated tongue, totally alien; and we have had only a few hours to grapple with the problem. Therefore, though we have been able to extract some meaning from two of the frames, there are many blank spaces and many perplexities. In our favor are these facts: first—all language, possibly anywhere in the universe, appears to have a developmental logic and relationship; secondly, these frames deal with life on earth; and finally, it is our good fortune that this is an alphabetic form of writing, consisting, so far as we can determine, of forty-one sound signs, at least thirty of them consonantal. These consonantal forms suggest a vocal arrangement not unlike our own—that is in physical structure, for sounds are to a large extent determined by the physical characteristics of the creature producing them. My colleagues agree that there is no indication of any relationship between this alphabet and language and any known language of Earth. For my part, I will make no comment on the origin of this language. It is not my field—nor is it my purpose."

The President nodded. "We understand that, Professor Goldman."

Goldman continued: "The affidavit itself will be projected on the screen, since we consider it more effective for the partial translation to be read rather than heard."

The room was then darkened again, and the following appeared on the screen:

"A tentative and partial translation of the first two frames of a film strip, given to the undersigned for translation purposes:

"— — greedy lustful—[dedicated?] [practicing?] mass [murder?] [death?] — [time] generations [of?] murder — [docile?] [willing?] O when shown pleasure — — — [titled?] [self styled?] [boastful self styled?] man [or humanity?] — — [compare to?] [equate with?] disease [or plague or rust] on face of [fair?] [rich?] planet [or globe] — — — — —"

The voice of Professor Goldman cut in, "That is the first frame. As you see, our translation is tentative and incomplete. We have

very little to work from. Where the word is within brackets and coupled with a question mark, we are making what might be called a calculated surmise not a guess, but a surmise from too few facts. Now the second frame.

"Force [or violence] understood [or reacted to] — man [or humanity] — — primitive [or number 1] development of atomic [force or power or engine] — — [space station or small planet] — [non-possession-relating possibly to space station] — — [outer space?] [void?] negative [long arm?] [weapon?] — — — — [superstition?] [ignorance?] [mindless] — — — —"

The inscription remained on the screen, and Goldman's voice, flat, tired and expressionless, explained:

"When we bracket a number of words, one after another, we are uncertain as to which is preferable. Actually, only a single word is being translated—" His voice faded away. The names of the six philologists appeared on the screen. The lights went on, but the silence was as deep and lasting as the darkness before it. Finally, the Secretary of State rose, looked at the President, received his nod, and said to Professor Goldman:

"I desire your opinion, Professor. Are these faked? Do they originate on earth? Or are we dealing with Martians? That's not a dirty word. Everyone is thinking it; no one will say it. I want your opinion."

"I am a scientist and a scholar, sir. I form opinions only when I have sufficient facts to make them credible. This is not the case now."

"You have more facts than anyone on earth! You can read that outlandish gibberish!"

"No more than you can, sir," Goldman replied softly. "What I have read, you have read."

"You come to it as a philologist," the Secretary of State persisted.

"Yes."

"Then as a philologist, is it your opinion that this language originated on earth?"

"How can I answer that, sir? What is my opinion worth when fashioned out of such thin stuff?"

"Then tell us—do you detect any relationship to any known Earthly language?"

"No—no, I do not," Goldman answered, smiling rather sadly.

And then there was silence again. Now one of the President's secretaries appeared, and distributed copies of the affidavit to everyone present. A longer silence now, while the affidavits were studied. Then the French ambassador asked for the floor.

"Mr. President," he said, "members of the cabinet and gentlemen—many of you know that my own government discussed this same problem yesterday. I am instructed, if the occasion should so determine, to make a certain request of you. I think the occasion does so determine. I request that you send immediately for the Soviet Ambassador."

No one was shocked or surprised by the suggestion. The Soviet Ambassador was sent for. He had evidently been waiting, for he arrived within minutes; and when he stated immediately that he would also represent the People's Republic of China or take his leave, the President of the United States suppressed a smile and nodded. He was given a precis and a copy of the affidavit, and after he had read both, the meeting began. It went on until three o'clock on Wednesday morning, during which time thirty-two technical specialists arrived, gave opinion or testimony, and departed. Then the meeting was suspended for five hours—and came together again with the representatives of India, China, Great Britain, Italy and Germany in attendance. At six o'clock Wednesday evening, the meeting was adjourned, and the following day an extraordinary session of the Assembly of the United Nations was called. By that time, Professor Goldman, with the assistance of Japanese, Chinese and Russian philologists, had completed a tentative translation of the film strip. Before this complete translation was published in the international press, it was made available to all delegates to the United Nations Assembly.

On Saturday, only a week after Detective Sergeant Bristol had

forced the door of the Fifth Avenue shop, the Premier of India arose to address the Assembly of the United Nations.

"It is more than ironic," he said with some sadness, "that we who have been so savagely condemned by another planet, another culture and people, can find more than a little truth in the accusations. How close we have come, time and again, to accomplishing the destruction outlined by these people from outer space! And how unhappy it is to know that our own fitful dream of a peaceful future must be laid aside, perhaps forever! Shall it be some consolation that we must join hands to fight another enemy rather than each other? I pray so, for it is not without deep grief that my country lays aside the slim shield of neutrality it has clung to so desperately. Gentlemen, India is yours; its teeming millions will labor in the common defense of our mother earth. Its inadequate mills and mines are at the world's disposal, and I hope with all my heart that we have time to build more."

Then Russia spoke, then the United States. China and eight other countries were admitted to the United Nations without a veto; but this was only the beginning of a series of actions which led, within the month, to the creation of World Spaceways—an international plan for the building of four great space stations circling the earth, a mighty fleet of atomically powered space-ships, and the construction of a military defense base on the moon, under the control of the United Nations. A three-year plan for the defense of Earth was put into operation; and as so few had anticipated, the beginnings of world government in terms of actual sovereign power, came with a comprehensive world general staff.

Within three months after Detective Sergeant Bristol's discovery, the first world code of law was drafted and presented to the General Assembly. The antiquated and rusting ships of the navies of earth, the discarded and useless artillery, the already archaic guided missiles, the laughable small arms—all of them bore witness to the beginning of world government.

And in less than a year, Culpepper Motors, one of the largest industrial complexes on earth, announced that they had dupli-

cated the Martian outboard atomic motor. The people of earth laughed and flexed their arms. When they looked up at the sky, at the tiny red orb of Mars, it was with growing confidence and lessening fear.

For they had discovered a new name for themselves; they had discovered that they were a nation of mankind. It was a beginning—rough and fumbling and uneasy in many of its aspects, but nevertheless a beginning. And all over the earth, this *beginning* was celebrated in a variety of ways.

At the home of Franklin Harwood Plummer, its eighty-three rooms nestled securely in the midst of an eleven hundred acre estate in New York's Putnam County, it was celebrated in a style befitting the place and circumstances. Mr. Plummer could and did give dinners that were large and important and unnoticed by the press—a fact not unrelated to his control of a great deal of the press, among other things. But even for his baronial halls, this evening's gathering was large and unique, three hundred and twenty-seven men and women, apart from Mr. Plummer himself and his eighteen colleagues who composed the Board of Directors of Culpepper Motors.

At fifty-eight, Mr. Plummer was President of Culpepper. Culpepper Motors had a net value of fifteen million dollars, a private industrial worth exceeded, in all the world, only by American Tel and Tel; but if one were to trace the interlocking and various influences of the nineteen board members, the question of worth became so large as to be meaningless. As the nominal lord of this giant enterprise, Mr. Plummer was best defined by his history. He had started, thirty-five years before, as a lathe operator in the old Lewett Shop, and he had fought and smashed and cut his way to the eventual top. In the recent history of America, there have been a few cases like his, but not more than you could count on the fingers of one hand.

Even in his own circles, he was not loved; feared and respected he was, but without family or university, he remained a strange, violent and unpredictable interloper. He was tall and broad and

red-faced and white-haired; and as he stood at one end of the great dining room in his over-large and over-furnished home, he made reference to the fact that he did not even play golf. His three hundred and twenty-seven guests and his eighteen colleagues permitted themselves to smile slightly at that.

"No," Mr. Plummer continued, "no golf, no tennis, no sailing—I have been what most of you would call a preoccupied man, and my preoccupation has been the making of money. If I have ever laved my conscience with any sop, it was to recollect that single witty remark of a man who was otherwise remarkably humorless, Calvin Coolidge—who gave folk like myself grace by stating that the business of the United States was business."

Mr. Plummer grinned. He had an infectious grin—the smile of a man who has made it beyond belief, who drives back to the old home town in a chrome-plated Cadillac.

"I enjoy making money," he said simply. "I am accused of lusting for power. Hogwash! I lust for a naked and nasty word—profit; always have and I always will. It embarrasses my eighteen colleagues, sitting here on either side of me, for me to be as blunt and ignoble as this; but I thank whatever gods may be that I have never been inhibited by breeding. I also make a double point. Firstly, the question of profit—I succeeded. Not only have I been able to insure and secure the future existence of Culpepper Motors; not only have I developed a situation where its profits will increase every year—perhaps double every five years, which makes our stock a pretty good investment for any of you—but I have been able to bring together under this roof as fine a collection of human beings as mankind can provide. I will not try to explain what that means to me—what it has meant to know and work with each of the three hundred and twenty-seven people here. I think you can guess.

"Secondly, I said what I said to ease the feelings of those among you who have cooperated in our enterprise and have been paid for their cooperation—as against those who would accept no pay. Those who have been paid may feel a certain guilt. To that I say—nonsense! No one does anything strictly for money; there are al-

ways other factors. I know. I went into this for dollars and cents—plain and simple, and so did my holier than God colleagues on my Board of Directors. We have all changed in the process. My colleagues can stop wishing me dead. I love them for what they are now. I did not love them for what they were when we began this enterprise two years ago.

“Sitting among you, there is one Jonas Wayne of Fort Fayette, Kentucky. He is an old-fashioned blacksmith, and possibly the finest hand worker in metal in America. Our enterprise would have been more difficult, if not impossible, without him. Yet he would not take a dollar from me—not even for expenses. He is a God-fearing man, and he saw himself as doing God’s work, not mine. Perhaps so. I don’t know. At the same table with him is M. Orendell, the Ambassador of France. He is far from being a rich man, and his expenses have been paid. We have no secrets here. We live and die with our knowledge, as a unique fraternity. Professor Julius Goldman—would you please stand up, Professor—was, as you know, central to our whole scheme. If it was painless for him to decipher the Martian script, it was far from painless for him to devise it—a task that took more hours of work than the building of the motor. He would take no money—not because he is religious but because as he puts it, he is a scientist. Komo Aguchi, the physicist—he is at the table with Dr. Goldman, accepted one hundred thousand dollars, which he spent in an attempt to cure his wife, who is dying of cancer. Shall we judge him? Or shall we put cancer on the immediate agenda?

“And what of Detective Sergeant Tom Bristol? Is he an honest cop or a dishonest cop? He accepted four hundred shares of Culpepper Motors—a hundred for each of his children. He wants them to go to college, and they will. Miss Clementina Arden, possibly the finest decorator here or on Mars, charged us forty thousand dollars for her contribution to the decor. The price was reasonable. She is a hard-headed business woman, and if she does not look after herself, who will? Yet she has turned down other jobs. She didn’t turn down this one—

“Well, my good friends, ladies and gentlemen—we will not meet

again, ever. My father, a working man all his life, once said that perhaps if I opened a store, even a small store, I would no longer have my life subject to the crazy whim of this boss or that. Maybe he was right. Finally, with your good help, I opened three stores. The total cost, if you are interested, was twenty-one million dollars, more or less—and a shrewd investment, I don't mind saying. Culpepper Motors will add five times that sum to its profits over the next three months. And our three stores, I do believe, have accomplished a little something that wiser men have failed to do.

"That is all I have to say. Many of you may regret that no monuments will enshrine our work. I wish we could change that, but we can't. For myself, I feel that when a man's wealth reaches a certain point of large discomfort, he does better to remain out of the public's eye. So guard our secret—not because you will be believed if you reveal it, but because you will be laughed at . . ."

As time passed, the question arose as to the disposition of the one thing of value left by the "space merchants" as they came to be called—the solid gold letters. Finally, those from the Fifth Avenue shop were set in a glass display case at the United Nations. So visitors to the national museum of France or Japan—or to the United Nations, have always before them to remind them, in letters of gold:

MARS PRODUCTS

Fantasy and Science Fiction has published a number of stories about John, but the wanderer with the silver-stringed guitar has perhaps never faced a *bigger* problem than he does in this tale of a village faced with total destruction, and a tormented man in whose veins ran the blood of the Giants of Genesis.

Walk Like a Mountain

by Manly Wade Wellman

Once at Sky Notch, I never grudged the trouble getting there. It was so purely pretty, I was glad outlanders weren't apt to crowd in and spoil all.

The Notch cut through a tall peak that stood against a higher cliff. Steep brushy faces each side, and a falls at the back that made a tricky branch, with five pole cabins along the waterside. Corn patches, a few pigs in pens, chickens running round, a cow tied up one place. It wondered me how they ever got a cow up there. Laurels grew, and viney climbers, and mountain flowers in bunches and sprawls. The water made a happy noise. Nobody moved in the yards or at the doors, so I stopped by a tree and hollered the first house.

"Hello the house!" I called. "Hello to the man of the house and all inside!"

A plank door opened about an inch. "Hello to yourself," a gritty voice replied me. "Who's that out there with the guitar?"

I moved from under the tree. "My name's John. Does Mr. Lane Jarrett live up here? Got word for him, from his old place on Drowning Creek."

The door opened wider, and there stood a skimpy little man with gray whiskers. "That's funny," he said.

The funnyness I didn't see. I'd known Mr. Lane Jarrett years back, before he and his daughter Page moved to Sky Notch. When his uncle Jeb died and heired him some money, I'd agreed to carry it to Sky Notch, and, gentlemen, it was a long, weary way getting there.

First a bus, up and down and through mountains, stop at every pig trough for passengers. I got off at Charlie's Jump—who Charlie was, nor why or when he jumped, nobody there can rightly say. Climbed a high ridge, got down the far side, then a twenty-devil way along a deep valley river. Up another height, another beyond that. Then it was night, and nobody would want to climb the steep face above, because it was grown up with the kind of trees that the dark melts in around you. I made a fire and took my supper rations from my pocket. Woke at dawn and climbed up and up and up, and here I was.

"Funny, about Lane Jarrett," gritted the little man out. "Sure you ain't come about that business?"

I looked up the walls of the Notch. Their tops were toothy rocks, the way you'd think those walls were two jaws, near about to close on what they'd caught inside them. Right then the Notch didn't look so pretty.

"Can't say, sir," I told him, "till I know what business you mean."

"Rafe Enoch!" he boomed out the name, like firing two barrels of a gun. "That's what I mean!" Then he appeared to remember his manners, and came out, puny in his jeans and no shoes on his feet. "I'm Oakman Dillon," he named himself. "John—that's your name, huh? Why you got that guitar?"

"I pick it some," I replied him. "I sing." Tweaking the silver strings, I sang a few lines:

*By the shore of Lonesome River
Where the waters ebb and flow,
Where the wild red rose is budding
And the pleasant breezes blow,*

*It was there I spied the lady
That forever I adore,
As she was a-lonesome walking
By the Lonesome River shore. . . .*

"Rafe Enoch!" he grit-grated out again. "Carried off Miss Page Jarrett the way you'd think she was a banty chicken!"

Slap, I quieted the strings with my palm. "Mr. Lane's little daughter Page was stolen away?"

He sat down on the door-log. "She ain't suchy little daughter. She's six foot maybe three inches—taller'n you, even. Best-looking big woman I ever see, brown hair like a wagonful of home-cured tobacco, eyes green and bright as a fresh-squeeze grape pulp."

"Fact?" I said, thinking Page must have changed a right much from the long-leggy little girl I'd known, must have grown tall like her daddy and her dead mammy, only taller. "Is this Rafe Enoch so big, a girl like that is right for him?"

"She's puny for him. He's near about eight foot tall, best I judge." Oakman Dillon's gray whiskers stuck out like a mad cat's. "He just grabbed her last evening, where she walked near the fall, and up them rocks he went like a possum up a jack oak."

I sat down on a stump. "Mr. Lane's a friend of mine. How can I help?"

"Nobody can't help, John. It's right hard to think you ain't knowing all this stuff. Don't many strangers come up here. Ain't room for many to live in the Notch."

"Five homes," I counted them with my eyes.

"Six. Rafe Enoch lives up at the top." He jerked his head toward the falls. "Been there a long spell—years, I reckon, since when he run off from somewhere. Heard tell he broke a circus man's neck for offering him a job with a show. He built up top the falls, and he used to get along with us. Thanked us kindly for a mess of beans or roasting ears. Lately, he's been mean-talking."

"Nobody mean-talked him back? Five houses in the Notch mean five grown men—couldn't they handle one giant?"

"Giant size ain't all Rafe Enoch's got." Again the whiskers bristled up. "Why! He's got powers, like he can make rain fall—"

"No," I put in quick. "Can't even science men do that for sure."

"I ain't studying science men. Rafe Enoch says for rain to fall, down it comes, ary hour day or night he speaks. Could drown us out of this Notch if he had the mind."

"And he carried off Page Jarrett," I went back to what he'd said.

"That's the whole truth, John. Up he went with her in the evening, daring us to follow him."

I asked, "Where are the other Notch folks?"

"Up yonder by the falls. Since dawn we've been talking Lane Jarrett back from climbing up and getting himself neck-twisted. I came to feed my pigs, now I'm heading back."

"I'll go with you," I said, and since he didn't deny me I went.

The falls dropped down a height as straight up as a chimney, and a many times taller, and their water boiled off down the branch. Either side of the falls, the big boulder rocks piled on top of each other like stones in an almighty big wall. Looking up, I saw clouds boiling in the sky, dark and heavy and wet-looking, and I remembered what Oakman Dillon had said about big Rafe Enoch's rain-making.

A bunch of folks were there, and I made out Mr. Lane Jarrett, bald on top and bigger than the rest. I touched his arm, and he turned.

"John! Ain't seen you a way-back time. Let me make you known to these here folks."

He called them their first names—Yoot, Ollie, Bill, Duff, Miss Lulie, Miss Sara May and so on. I said I had a pocketful of money for him, but he just nodded and wanted to know did I know what was going on.

"Looky up against them clouds, John. That pointy rock. My girl Page is on it."

The rock stuck out like a spur on a rooster's leg. Somebody was scrouched down on it, with the clouds getting blacker above, and a long, long drop below.

"I see her blue dress," allowed Mr. Oakman, squinting up. "How long she been there, Lane?"

"I spotted her at sunup," said Mr. Lane. "She must have got away from Rafe Enoch and crope out there during the night. I'm going to climb."

He started to shinny up a rock, up clear of the brush around us. And, Lord, the laugh that came down on us! Like a big splash of

water, it was clear and strong, and like water it made us shiver. Mr. Oakman caught onto Mr. Lane's ankle and dragged him down.

"Ain't a God's thing ary man or woman can do, with him waiting up there," Mr. Oakman argued.

"But he's got Page," said Mr. Lane busting loose again. I grabbed his elbow.

"Let me," I said.

"You, John? You're a stranger, you ain't got no pick in this."

"This big Rafe Enoch would know if it was you or Mr. Oakman or one of these others climbing, he might fling down a rock or the like. But I'm strange to him. I might wonder him, and he might let me climb all the way up."

"Then?" Mr. Lane said, frowning.

"Once up, I might could do something."

"Leave him try it," said Mr. Oakman to that.

"Yes," said one of the lady-folks.

I slung my guitar behind my shoulder and took to the rocks. No peep of noise from anywhere for maybe a minute of climbing. I got on about the third or fourth rock from the bottom, and that clear, sky-ripping laugh came from over my head.

"Name yourself!" roared down the voice that had laughed.

I looked up. How high was the top I can't say, but I made out a head and shoulders looking down, and knew they were another sight bigger head and shoulders than ever I'd seen on ary mortal man.

"Name yourself!" he yelled again, and in the black clouds a lightning flash wiggled, like a snake caught fire.

"John!" I bawled back.

"What you aiming to do, John?"

Another crack of lightning, that for a second seemed to peel off the clouds right and left. I looked this way and that. Nowhere to get out of the way should lightning strike, or a rock or anything. On notion, I pulled my guitar to me and picked and sang:

*Went to the rock to hide my face,
The rock cried out, "No hiding place!" . . .*

Gentlemen, the laugh was like thunder after the lightning.

"Better climb quick, John!" he hollered me. "I'm a-waiting on you up here!"

I swarmed and swarved and scrabbled my way up, not looking down. Over my head that rock-spur got bigger, I figured it for maybe twelve-fifteen feet long, and on it I made out Page Jarrett in her blue dress. Mr. Oakman was right, she was purely big and she was purely good-looking. She hung to the pointy rock with both her long hands.

"Page," I said to her, with what breath I had left, and she stared with her green eyes and gave me an inch of smile. She looked to have a right much of her daddy's natural sand in her craw.

"John," boomed the thunder-voice, close over me now. "I asked you a while back, why you coming up?"

"Just to see how you make the rain fall," I said, under the overhang of the ledge. "Help me up."

Down came a bare brown honey-hairy arm, and a hand the size of a scoop shovel. It got my wrist and snatched me away like a turnip coming out of a patch, and I landed my feet on broad flat stones.

Below me yawned up those rock-toothed tops of the Notch's jaws. Inside them the brush and trees looked mossy and puny. The cabins were like baskets, the pigs and the cow like play-toys, and the branch looked to run so narrow you might bridge it with your shoe. Shadow fell on the Notch from the fattening dark clouds.

Then I looked at Rafe Enoch. He stood over me like a sycamore tree over a wood shed. He was the almightiest big thing I'd ever seen on two legs.

Eight foot high, Oakman Dillon had said truly, and he was thick-made in keeping. Shoulders wide enough to fill a barn door, and legs like tree trunks with fringe-sided buckskin pants on them, and his big feet wore moccasin shoes of bear's hide with the fur still on. His shirt, sewed together of pelts—fox, coon, the like of that—hadn't any sleeves, and hung open from that big chest of his that was like a cotton bale. Topping all, his face put you in mind of the full moon with a yellow beard, but healthy-looking brown,

not pale like the moon. Big and dark eyes, and through the yellow beard his teeth grinned like big white sugar lumps.

"Maybe I ought to charge you to look at me," he said.

I remembered how he'd struck a man dead for wanting him in a show, and I looked elsewhere. First, naturally, at Page Jarrett on the rock spur. The wind from the clouds waved her brown hair like a flag, and fluttered her blue skirt around her drawn-up feet. Then I turned and looked at the broad space above the falls.

From there I could see there was a right much of higher country, and just where I stood with Rafe Enoch was a big shelf, like a lap, with slopes behind it. In the middle of the flat space showed a pond of water, running out past us to make the falls. On its edge stood Rafe Enoch's house, built wigwam-style of big old logs leaned together and chinked between with clay over twigs. No trees to amount to anything on the shelf—just one behind the wigwam-house, and to its branches hung joints that looked like smoke meat.

"You hadn't played that guitar so clever, maybe I mightn't have saved you," said Rafe Enoch's thunder voice.

"Saved?" I repeated him.

"Look." His big club of a finger pointed to the falls, then to those down-hugged clouds. "When they get together, what happens?"

Just at the ledge lip, where the falls went over, stones looked halfway washed out. A big shove of water would take them out the other half, and the whole thing pour down on the Notch.

"Why you doing this to the folks?" I asked.

He shook his head. "John, this is one rain I never called for." He put one big pumpkin-sized fist into the palm of his other hand. "I can call for rain, sure, but some of it comes without me. I can't start it or either stop it, I just know it's coming. I've known about this for days. It'll drown out Sky Notch like a rat nest."

"Why didn't you try to tell them?"

"I tried to tell her." His eyes cut around to where Page Jarrett hung to the pointy rock, and his stool-leg fingers raked his yellow beard. "She was walking off by herself, alone. I know how it feels to

be alone. But when I told her, she called me a liar. I brought her up here to save her, and she cried and fought me." A grin. "She fought me better than any living human I know. But she can't fight me hard enough."

"Can't you do anything about the storm?" I asked him to tell.

"Can do this." He snapped his big fingers, and lightning crawled through the clouds over us. It made me turtle my neck inside my shirt collar. Rafe Enoch never twitched his eyebrow.

"Rafe," I said, "you might could persuade the folks. They're not your size, but they're human like you."

"Them?" He roared his laugh. "They're not like me, nor you aren't like me, either, though you're longer-made than common. Page yonder, she looks to have some of the old Genesis giant blood in her. That's why I saved her alive."

"Genesis giant blood," I repeated him, remembering the Book, sixth chapter of Genesis. "There were giants in the earth in those days."

"That's the whole truth," said Rafe. "When the sons of God took wives of the daughters of men—their children were the mighty men of old, the men of renown. That's not exact quote, but it's near enough."

He sat down on a rock, near about as tall sitting as I was standing. "Any giant knows he was born from the sons of the gods," he said. "My name tells it, John."

I nodded, figuring it. "Rafe—Raphah, the giant whose son was Goliath, Enoch—"

"Or Anak," he put in. "Remember the sons of Anak, and them scared-out spies sent into Canaan? They was grasshoppers in the sight of the sons of Anak, in more ways than just size, John." He sniffed. "They got scared back into the wilderness for forty years. And Goliath!"

"David killed him," I dared remind Rafe.

"By a trick. A slingshot stone. Else he'd not lasted any longer than that."

A finger-snap, and lightning winged over us like a hawk over a chicken run. I tried not to scrouch down.

"What use to fight little old human men," he said, "when you got the sons of the gods in your blood?"

I allowed he minded me of Strap Buckner with that talk.

"Who's Strap Buckner? Why do I mind you of him?"

I picked the guitar, I sang the song:

*Strap Buckner he was called, he was more than eight foot tall,
And he walked like a mountain among men.*

*He was good and he was great, and the glorious Lone Star State
Will never look upon his like again.*

"Strap Buckner had the strength of ten lions," I said, "and he used it as ten lions. Scorned to fight ordinary folks, so he challenged old Satan himself, skin for skin, on the banks of the Brazos, and if Satan hadn't fought foul—"

"Another dirty fighter!" Rafe got up from where he sat, quick as quick for all his size. "Foul or not, Satan couldn't whup me!"

"Might be he couldn't," I judged, looking at Rafe. "But anyway, the Notch folks never hurt you. Used to give you stuff to eat."

"Don't need their stuff to eat," he said, the way you'd think that was the only argument. He waved his hand past his wigwam-house. "Down yonder is a bunch of hollows, where ain't no human man been, except maybe once the Indians. I hoe some corn there, some potatoes. I pick wild salad greens here and yonder. I kill me a deer, a bear, a wild hog—ain't no human man got nerve to face them big wild hogs, but I chunk them with a rock or I fling a sharp ash sapling, and what I fling at I bring down. In the pond here I spear me fish. Don't need their stuff to eat, I tell you."

"Need it or not, why let them drown out?"

His face turned dark, the way you'd think smoke drifted over it.

"I can't abide little folks' little eyes looking at me, wondering themselves about me, thinking I'm not rightly natural."

He waited for what I had to say, and it took nerve to say it.

"But you're not a natural man, Rafe. You've allowed that yourself, you say you come from different blood. Paul Bunyan thought the same thing."

He grinned his big sugar-lump teeth at me. Then: "Page Jarrett," he called, "better come off that rock before the rain makes it slippery and you fall off. I'll help you—"

"You stay where you are," she called back. "Let John help."

I went to the edge of that long drop down. The wind blew from some place—maybe below, maybe above or behind or before. I reached out my guitar, and Page Jarrett crawled to where she could lay hold, and that way I helped her to the solid standing. She stood beside me, inches taller, and she put a burning mean look on Rafe Enoch. He made out he didn't notice.

"Paul Bunyan," he said, after what I'd been saying. "I've heard tell his name—champion logger in the northern states, wasn't he?"

"Champion logger," I said. "Bigger than you, I reckon—"

"Not bigger!" thundered Rafe Enoch.

"Well, as big."

"Know ary song about him?"

"Can't say there's been one made. Rafe, you say you despise to be looked on by folks."

"Just by little folks, John. Page Jarrett can look on me if she relishes to."

Quick she looked off, and drew herself up proud. Right then she appeared to be taller than what Mr. Oakman Dillon had reckoned her, and a beauty-looking thing she was, you hear what I say, gentlemen. I cut my eyes up to the clouds; they hung down over us, loose and close, like the roof of a tent. I could feel the closeness around me, the way you feel water when you've waded up to the line of your mouth.

"How soon does the rain start falling?" I asked Rafe.

"Can fall ary time now," said Rafe, pulling a grass-stalk to bite in his big teeth. "Page's safe off that rock point, it don't differ me a shuck when that rain falls."

"But when?" I asked again. "You know."

"Sure I know." He walked toward the pond, and me with him. I felt Page Jarrett's grape-green eyes digging our backs. The pond water was shiny tarry black from reflecting the clouds. "Sure," he

said, "I know a right much. You natural human folks, you know so pitiful little I'm sorry for you."

"Why not teach us?" I wondered him, and he snorted like a big mean horse.

"Ain't the way it's reckoned to be, John. Giants are figured stupid. Remember the tales? Your name's John—do you call to mind a tale about a man named Jack, long back in time?"

"Jack the Giant Killer," I nodded. "He trapped a giant in a hole—"

"Cormoran," said Rafe. "Jack dug a pit in front of his door. And Blunderbore he tricked into stabbing himself open with a knife. But how did them things happen? He blew a trumpet to tole Cormoran out, and he sat and ate at Blunderbore's table like a friend before tricking him to death." A louder snort. "More foul fighting, John. Did you come up here to be Jack the Giant Killer? Got some dirty tricks? If that's how it is, you done drove your ducks to the wrong puddle."

"More than a puddle here," I said, looking at the clouds and then across the pond. "See yonder, Rafe, where the water edge comes above that little slanty slope. If it was open, enough water could run off to keep the Notch from flooding."

"Could be done," he nodded his big head, "if you had machinery to pull the rocks out. But they're bigger than them fall rocks, they ain't half washed away to begin with. And there ain't no machinery, so just forget it. The Notch washes out, with most of the folks living in it—all of them, if the devil bids high enough. Sing me a song."

I swept the strings with my thumb. "Thinking about John Henry," I said, half to myself. "He wouldn't need a machine to open up a drain-off place yonder."

"How'd he do it?" asked Rafe.

"He had a hammer twice the size ary other man swung," I said. "He drove steel when they cut the Big Bend Tunnel through Cruze Mountain. Out-drove the steam drill they brought to compete him out of his job."

"Steam drill," Rafe repeated me, the way you'd think he was

faintly recollecting the tale. "They'd do that—ordinary size folks, trying to work against a giant. How big was John Henry?"

"Heard tell he was the biggest man ever in Virginia."

"Big as me?"

"Maybe not quite. Maybe just stronger."

"Stronger!"

I had my work cut out not to run from the anger in Rafe Enoch's face.

"Well," I said, "he beat the steam drill. . . ."

*John Henry said to his captain,
"A man ain't nothing but a man,
But before I let that steam drill run me down,
I'll die with this hammer in my hand. . . ."*

"He'd die trying," said Rafe, and his ears were sort of cocked forward, the way you hear elephants do to listen.

"He'd die winning," I said, and sang the next verse:

*John Henry drove steel that long day through,
The steam drill failed by his side.
The mountain was high, the sun was low,
John he laid down his hammer and he died. . . .*

"Killed himself beating the drill!" and Rafe's pumpkin fist banged into his other palm. "Reckon I could have beat it and lived!"

I was looking at the place where the pond could have a drain-off.

"No," said Rafe. "Even if I wanted to, I don't have no hammer twice the size of other folks' hammers."

A drop of rain fell on me. I started around the pond.

"Where you going?" Rafe called, but I didn't look back. Stopped beside the wigwam-house and put my guitar inside. It was gloomy in there, but I saw his home-made stool as high as a table, his table almost chin high to a natural man, a bed woven of hickory splits and spread with bear and deer skins to be the right bed for

Og, King of Bashan, in the Book of Joshua. Next to the door I grabbed up a big pole of hickory, off some stacked firewood.

"Where you going?" he called again.

I went to where the slope started. I poked my hickory between two rocks and started to pry. He laughed, and rain sprinkled down.

"Go on, John," he granted me. "Grub out a sluiceway there. I like to watch little scrabby men work. Come in the house, Page, we'll watch him from in there."

I couldn't budge the rocks from each other. They were big—like trunks or grain sacks, and must have weighed in the half-tons. They were set in there, one next to the other, four-five of them holding the water back from pouring down that slope. I heaved on my hickory till it bent like a bow.

"Come on," said Rafe again, and I looked around in time to see him put out his shovel hand and take her by the wrist. Gentlemen, the way she slapped him with her other hand it made me jump with the crack.

I watched, knee deep in water. He put his hand to his gold-bearded cheek and his eye-whites glittered in the rain.

"If you was a man," he boomed down at Page, "I'd slap you dead."

"Do it!" she blazed him back. "I'm a woman, and I don't fear you or ary overgrown, sorry-for-himself giant ever drew breath!"

With me standing far enough off to forget how little I was by them, they didn't seem too far apart in size. Page was like a small-made woman facing up to a sizeable man, that was all.

"If you was a man—" he began again.

"I'm no man, nor neither ain't you a man!" she cut off. "Don't know if you're an ape or a bull-brute or what, but you're no man! John's the only man here, and I'm helping him! Stop me if you dare!"

She ran to where I was. Rain battered her hair into a brown tumble and soaked her dress snug against her fine proud strong body. Into the water she splashed.

"Let me pry," and she grabbed the hickory pole. "I'll pry up and you tug up, and maybe—"

I bent to grab the rock with my hands. Together we tried. Seemed to me the rock stirred a little, like the drowsy sleeper in the old song. Dragging at it, I felt the muscles strain and crackle in my shoulders and arms.

"Look out!" squealed Page. "Here he comes!"

Up on the bank she jumped again, with the hickory ready to club at him. He paid her no mind, she stooped down toward where I was.

"Get on out of there!" he bellowed, the way I've always reckoned a buffalo bull might do. "Get out!"

"But—but—" I was wheezing. "Somebody's got to move this rock—"

"You ain't budging it ary mite!" he almost deafened me in the ear. "Get out and let somebody there can do something!"

He grabbed my arm and snatched me out of the water, so sudden I almost sprained my fingers letting go the rock. Next second he jumped in, with a splash like a jolt-wagon going off a bridge. His big shovelly hands clamped the sides of the rock, and through the falling rain I saw him heave.

He swole up like a mad toad-frog. His patchy fur shirt split down the middle of his back while those muscles humped under his skin. His teeth flashed out in his beard, set hard together.

Then, just when I thought he'd bust open, that rock came out of its bed, came up in the air, landing on the bank away from where it'd been.

"I swear, Rafe—" I began to say.

"Help him," Page put in. "Let's both help."

We scrabbled for a hold on the rock, but Rafe hollered us away, so loud and sharp we jumped back like scared dogs. I saw that rock quiver, and cracks ran through the rain-soaked dirt around it. Then it came up on end, the way you'd think it had hinges, and Rafe got both arms around it and heaved it clear. He laughed, with the rain wet in his beard.

Standing clear where he'd told her to stand, Page pointed to the falls' end.

Looked as if the rain hadn't had to put down but just a little bit.

Those loose rocks trembled and shifted in their places. They were ready to go. Then Rafe saw what we saw.

"Run, you two!" he howled above that racketty storm. "Run, run—quick!"

I didn't tarry to ask the reason. I grabbed Page's arm and we ran toward the falls. Running, I looked back past my elbow.

Rafe had straightened up, straddling among the rocks by the slope. He looked into the clouds, that were almost resting on his shaggy head, and both his big arms lifted and his hands spread and then their fingers snapped. I could hear the snaps—*Whop! Whop!* like two pistol shots.

He got what he called for, a forked stroke of lightning, straight and hard down on him like a fish-gig in the hands of the Lord's top angel. It slammed down on Rafe and over and around him, and it shook itself all the way from rock to clouds. Rafe Enoch in its grip lit up and glowed, the way you'd think he'd been forge-hammered out of iron and heated red in a furnace to temper him.

I heard the almightiest tearing noise I ever could call for. I felt the rock shelf quiver all the way to where we'd stopped dead to watch. My thought was, the falls had torn open and the Notch was drowning.

But the lightning yanked back to where it had come from. It had opened the sluiceway, and water flooded through and down slope, and Rafe had fallen down while it poured and puddled over him.

"He's struck dead!" I heard Page say over the rain.

"No," I said back.

For Rafe Enoch was on his knees, on his feet, and out of that drain-off rush, somehow staggering up from the flat sprawl where the lightning had flung him. His knees wobbled and bucked, but he drew them up straight and mopped a big muddy hand across his big muddy face.

He came walking toward us, slow and dreamy-moving, and by now the rain rushed down instead of fell down. It was like what my old folks used to call raining tomcats and hoe handles. I bowed my head to it, and made to pull Page toward Rafe's wigwam; but she

wouldn't pull, she held where she was, till Rafe came up with us. Then, all three, we went together and got into the tight, dark shelter of the wigwam-house, with the rain and wind battering the outside of it.

Rafe and I sat on the big bed, and Page on a stool, looking small there. She wrung the water out of her hair.

"You all right?" she inquired Rafe.

I looked at him. Between the drain-off and the wigwam, rain had washed off that mud that gaumed all over him. He was wet and clean, with his patch-pelt shirt hanging away from his big chest and shoulders in soggy rags.

The lightning had singed off part of his beard. He lifted big fingers to wipe off the wet fluffy ash, and I saw the stripe on his naked arm, on the broad back of his hand, and I made out another stripe just like it on the other. Lightning had slammed down both hands and arms, and clear down his flanks and legs—I saw the burnt lines on his fringed leggings. It was like a double lash of God's whip.

Page got off the stool and came close to him. Just then he didn't look so out-and-out much bigger than she was. She put a long gentle finger on that lightning lash where it ran along his shoulder.

"Does it hurt?" she asked. "You got some grease I could put on it?"

He lifted his head, heavy, but didn't look at her. He looked at me. "I lied to you all," he said.

"Lied to us?" I asked him.

"I did call for the rain. Called for the biggest rain I ever thought of. Didn't pure down want to kill off the folks in the Notch, but to my reckoning, if I made it rain, and saved Page up here—"

At last he looked at her, with a shamed face.

"The others would be gone and forgotten. There'd be Page and me." His dark eyes grabbed her green ones. "But I didn't rightly know how she disgusts the sight of me." His head dropped again. "I feel the nearest to nothing I ever did."

"You opened the drain-off and saved the Notch from your rain,"

put in Page, her voice so gentle you'd never think it. "Called down the lightning to help you."

"Called down the lightning to kill me," said Rafe. "I never reckoned it wouldn't. I wanted to die. I want to die now."

"Live," she bade him.

He got up at that, standing tall over her.

"Don't worry when folks look on you," she said, her voice still ever so gentle. "They're just wondered at you, Rafe. Folks were wondered that same way at Saint Christopher, the giant who carried Lord Jesus across the river."

"I was too proud," he mumbled in his big bull throat. "Proud of my Genesis giant blood, of being one of the sons of God—"

"Shoo, Rafe," and her voice was gentler still, "the least man in size you'd call for, when he speaks to God, he says, 'Our Father.'"

Rafe turned from her.

"You said I could look on you if I wanted," said Page Jarrett. "And I want."

Back he turned, and bent down, and she rose on her toetips so their faces came together.

The rain stopped, the way you'd think that stopped it. But they never seemed to know it, and I picked up my guitar and went out toward the lip of the cliff.

The falls were going strong, but the drain-off handled enough water so there'd be no washout to drown the folks below. I reckoned the rocks would be the outdoingist slippery rocks ever climbed down by mortal man, and it would take me a long time. Long enough, maybe so, for me to think out the right way to tell Mr. Lane Jarrett he was just before having himself a son-in-law of the Genesis giant blood, and pretty soon after while, grandchildren of the same strain.

The sun came stabbing through the clouds and flung them away in chunks to right and left, across the bright blue sky.

From volume 1, number 1. . . . By the versatile author of *The Werewolf of Paris*—an acute comment on the implications of the machine age. . . .

Men of Iron

by Guy Endore

"We no longer trust the human hand," said the engineer, and waved his roll of blueprints. He was a dwarfish, stocky fellow with dwarfish, stocky fingers that crumpled blueprints with familiar unconcern.

The director frowned, pursed his lips, cocked his head, drew up one side of his face in a wink of unbelief and scratched his chin with a reflective thumbnail. Behind his grotesque contortions he recalled the days when he was manufacturer in his own right and not simply the nominal head of a manufacturing concern, whose owners extended out into complex and invisible ramifications. In his day the human hand had been trusted.

"Now take that lathe," said the engineer. He paused dramatically, one hand flung out toward the lathe in question, while his dark eyes, canopied by bristly eyebrows, remained fastened on the director.

"Listen to it!"

"Well?" said the director, somewhat at a loss.

"Hear it?"

"Why, yes, of course."

The engineer snorted. "Well, you shouldn't."

"Why not?"

"Because noise isn't what it is supposed to make. Noise is an indication of loose parts, maladjustments, improper speed of operation. That machine is sick. It is inefficient and its noise destroys the worker's efficiency."

The director laughed. "That worker should be used to it by this time. Why, that fellow is the oldest employee of the firm. Began with my father. See the gold crescent on his chest?"

"What gold crescent?"

"The gold pin on the shoulder strap of his overalls."

"Oh, that."

"Yes. Well, only workers fifty years or longer with our firm are entitled to wear it."

The engineer threw back his head and guffawed.

The director was wounded.

"Got many of them?" the engineer asked, when he had recovered from his outburst.

"Anton is the only one, now. There used to be another."

"How many pins does he spoil?"

"Well," said the director, "I'll admit he's not so good as he used to be . . . But there's one man I'll never see fired," he added stoutly.

"No need to," the engineer agreed. "A good machine is automatic and foolproof; the attendant's skill is beside the point."

For a moment the two men stood watching Anton select a fat pin from a bucket at his feet and fasten it into the chuck. With rule and caliper he brought the pin into correct position before the drill that was to gouge a hole into it.

Anton moved heavily, circumspectly. His body had the girth, but not the solidity of an old tree-trunk: it was shaken by constant tremors. The tools wavered in Anton's hands. Intermittently a slimy cough came out of his chest, tightened the cords of his neck and flushed the taut yellow skin of his cheeks. Then he would stop to spit, and after that he would rub his mustache that was the color of silver laid thinly over brass. His lungs relieved, Anton's frame regained a measure of composure, but for a moment he stood still and squinted at the tools in his hands as if he could not at once recall exactly what he was about, and only after a little delay did he resume his interrupted work, all too soon to be interrupted again. Finally, spindle and tool being correctly aligned, Anton brought the machine into operation.

"Feel it?" the engineer cried out with a note of triumph.

"Feel what?" asked the director.

"Vibration!" the engineer exclaimed with disgust.

"Well what of it?"

"Man, think of the power lost in shaking your building all day long. Any reason why you should want your floors and walls to dance all day long, while you pay the piper?"

He hadn't intended so telling a sentence. The conclusion seemed to him so especially apt that he repeated it: "Your building dances while you pay the piper in increased power expenditure."

And while the director remained silent the engineer forced home his point: "That power should be concentrated at the cutting point of the tool and not leak out all over. What would you think of a plumber who only brought 50 per cent of the water to the nozzle letting the rest flood through the building?"

And as the director still did not speak, the engineer continued: "There's not only loss of power but increased wear on the parts. That machine is afflicted with the aguel!"

When the day's labor was over, the long line of machines stopped all together; the workmen ran for the washrooms and a sudden throbbing silence settled over the great hall. Only Anton, off in a corner by himself, still worked his lathe, oblivious of the emptiness of the factory, until darkness finally forced him to quit. Then from beneath the lathe he dragged forth a heavy tarpaulin and covered his machine.

He stood for a moment beside his lathe, seemingly lost in thought, but perhaps only quietly wrestling with the stubborn torpidity of his limbs, full of an unwanted, incorrect motion, and disobedient to his desires. For he, like the bad machines in the factory, could not prevent his power from spilling over into useless vibration.

The old watchman opened the gate to let Anton out. The two men stood near each other for a moment, separated by the iron grill and exchanged a few comforting grunts, then hobbled off to their separate destinations, the watchman to make his rounds, Anton to his home.

A gray, wooden shack, on a bare lot, was Anton's home. During the day an enthusiastic horde of children trampled the ground to a rubber-like consistency and extinguished every growing thing except a few dusty weeds that clung close to the protection of the house or nestled around the remnants of the porch that had once adorned the front. There the children's feet could not reach them, and they expanded a few scornful coarse leaves, a bitter growth of Ishmaelites.

Within were a number of rooms, but only one inhabitable. The torn and peeling wallpaper in this one revealed the successive designs that had once struck the fancy of the owners. A remnant of ostentatiousness still remained in the marble mantelpiece, and in the stained glass window through which the arc-light from the street cast cold flakes of color.

She did not stir when Anton entered. She lay resting on the bed, not so much from the labor of the day, as from that of years. She heard his shuffling, noisy walk, heard his groans, his coughing, his whistling breath, and smelled, too, the pungent odor of machine oil. She was satisfied that it was he, and allowed herself to fall into a light sleep, through which she could still hear him moving around in the room and feel him when he dropped into bed beside her and settled himself against her for warmth and comfort.

The engineer was not satisfied with the addition of an automatic feeder and an automatic chuck. "The whole business must settle itself into position automatically," he declared, "there's altogether too much waste with hand calibration."

Formerly Anton had selected the pins from a bucket and fastened them correctly into the chuck. Now a hopper fed the pins one by one into a chuck that grasped them at once of itself.

As he sat in a corner, back against the wall and ate his lunch, Anton sighed. His hands fumbled the sandwich and lost the meat or the bread, while his coffee dashed stormily in his cup. His few yellow teeth, worn flat, let the food escape through the interstices. His grinders did not meet. Tired of futile efforts he dropped his bread into his cup and sucked in the resulting mush.

Then he lay resting and dreaming.

To Anton, in his dream, came the engineer and declared that he had a new automatic hopper and chuck for Anton's hands and mouth. They were of shining steel with many rods and wheels moving with assurance through a complicated pattern. And now, though the sandwich was made of pins, of hard steel pins, Anton's new chuck was equal to it. He grasped the sandwich of pins with no difficulty at all. His new steel teeth bit into the pins, ground them, chewed them and spat them forth again with vehemence. Faster and faster came the pins, and faster and faster the chuck seized them in its perfectly occluding steel dogs, played with them, toyed with them, crunched them, munched them. . . .

A heavy spell of coughing shook Anton awake. For a moment he had a sensation as though he must cough up steel pins, but though his chest was racked as if truly heavy steel pins must come forth, nothing appeared but the usual phlegm and slime.

"We must get rid of this noise and vibration before we can adjust any self-regulating device," said the engineer. "Now this, for example, see? It doesn't move correctly. Hear it click and scrape. That's bad."

Anton stood by, and the engineer and his assistant went to work. From their labors there came forth a sleek mechanism that purred gently as it worked. Scarcely a creak issued from its many moving parts, and a tiny snort was all the sound one heard when the cutting edge came to grips with a pin.

"Can't hear her cough and sputter and creak now, can you?" said the engineer to the director. "And the floor is quiet. Yes, I'm beginning to be proud of that machine, and now I think we can set up an adjustable cam here to make the whole operation automatic.

"Every machine should be completely automatic. A machine that needs an operator," he declared oratorically, "is an invalid."

In a short time the cams were affixed and now the carriage with the cutting tool traveled back and forth of itself and never failed

to strike the pin at the correct angle and at the correct speed of rotation.

All Anton had to do now was to stop the machine in case of a hitch. But soon even that task was unnecessary. No hitches were ever to occur again. Electronic tubes at several points operated mechanisms designed to eject faulty pins either before they entered the hopper or else after they emerged from the lathe.

Anton stood by and watched. That was all he had to do, for the machine now performed all the operations that he had used to do. In went the unfinished pins and out they came, each one perfectly drilled. Anton's purblind eyes could scarcely follow the separate pins of the stream that flowed into the machine. Now and then a pin was pushed remorselessly out of line and plumped sadly into a bucket. Cast out! Anton stooped laboriously and retrieved the pin. "That could have been used," he thought.

"Krr-click, krr-click," went the feeder, while the spindle and the drill went *zzz-sntt, zzz-sntt, zzz-sntt*, and the belt that brought the pins from a chattering machine beyond, rolled softly over the idlers with a noise like a breeze in a sail. Already the machine had finished ten good pins while Anton was examining a single bad one.

Late in the afternoon there appeared a number of important men. They surrounded the machine, examined it and admired it.

"That's a beauty," they declared.

Now the meeting took on a more official character. There were several short addresses. Then an imposing man took from a small leather box a golden crescent.

"The Crescent Manufacturing Company," he said, "takes pride and pleasure in awarding this automatic lathe a gold crescent." A place on the side of the machine had been prepared for the affixing of this distinction.

Now the engineer was called upon to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said fiercely, "I understand that formerly the Crescent Company awarded its gold crescent only to workmen who had given fifty years of service to the firm. In giving a gold

crescent to a machine, your President has perhaps unconsciously acknowledged a new era. . . ."

While the engineer developed his thesis, the director leaned over to his assistant and whispered, "Did you ever hear of why the sea is salt?"

"Why the sea is salt?" whispered back the assistant. "What do you mean?"

The director continued: "When I was a little kid, I heard the story of 'Why the sea is salt' many times, but I never thought it important until just a moment ago. It's something like this: Formerly the sea was fresh water and salt was rare and expensive. A miller received from a wizard a wonderful machine that just ground salt out of itself all day long. At first the miller thought himself the most fortunate man in the world, but soon all the villages had salt to last them for centuries and still the machine kept on grinding more salt. The miller had to move out of his house, he had to move off his acres. At last he determined that he would sink the machine in the sea and be rid of it. But the mill ground so fast that boat and miller and machine were sunk together, and down below, the mill still went on grinding and that's why the sea is salt."

"I don't get you," said the assistant.

Throughout the speeches, Anton had remained seated on the floor, in a dark corner, where his back rested comfortably against the wall. It had begun to darken by the time the company left, but still Anton remained where he was, for the stone floor and wall had never felt quite so restful before. Then, with a great effort, he roused his unwilling frame, hobbled over to his machine and dragged forth the tarpaulin.

Anton had paid little attention to the ceremony; it was, therefore, with surprise that he noticed the gold crescent on his machine. His weak eyes strained to pierce the twilight. He let his fingers play over the medal, and was aware of tears falling from his eyes, and could not divine the reason.

The mystery wearied Anton. His worn and trembling body sought the inviting floor. He stretched out, and sighed, and that sigh was his last.

When the daylight had completely faded, the machine began to hum softly. *Zzz-sntt, zzz-sntt*, it went, four times, and each time carefully detached a leg from the floor.

Now it rose erect and stood beside the body of Anton. Then it bent down and covered Anton with the tarpaulin. Out of the hall it stalked on sturdy legs. Its electron eyes saw distinctly through the dark, its iron limbs responded instantly to its every need. No noise racked its interior where its organs functioned smoothly and without a single tremor. To the watchman, who grunted his usual greeting without looking up, it answered never a word but strode on rapidly, confidently, through the windy streets of night—to Anton's house.

Anton's wife lay waiting, half-sleeping on the bed in the room where the arc-light came through the stained-glass window. And it seemed to her that a marvel happened: her Anton come back to her free of coughs and creaks and tremors; her Anton come to her in all the pride and folly of his youth, his breath like wind soughing through tree-tops, the muscles of his arms like steel.

Over the years, Raymond E. Banks's stories in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* have ranged from the touching and sober to the rib-tickling and outrageous. The present offering comes from the latter end of the spectrum. . . .

Rabbits to the Moon

by Raymond E. Banks

They were going to give the tired old man one more chance, he thought. They have me pushed to the wall, but they had better be careful when they get a type like me against the wall.

He lit a cigar with rock-steady hands, peering down the table, watching for the effect of his tired old hands being so rock-steady.

"Careful, gentlemen," he said, "that you don't arouse me. You'll find yourselves with an enraged Goom on your hands."

They stared back at him coldly.

He put down the fresh-lit cigar and saw that he already had another fresh-lit cigar in front of him. That totaled two cigars he was smoking at once. Under some conditions this could be a sign of nervousness.

"Mr. Goom," said Mr. Cutter, his voice patient as if speaking to a child, "you have your choice of becoming Chairman of the Board or leaving the Company. I am sorry, but we of the Goom Looms value the Company too much to miss the great opportunity offered us."

Reginald Goom picked up one of his cigars and puffed. He set it down with a flourish.

"Space-suits," he snorted. "The Goom Looms has always been a small, adequate textile plant. As a sub-contractor on space-suits we would simply become an appendage of Triumphant Textiles. No—we will not become greedy. I have resisted women's slacks. I have resisted pajamas. Now I resist space-suits. Fine business suits for progressive men—that's the objective of the Goom Looms, as it was in my father's time and shall always be."

Absently he pulled out his silver cigar case and extracted a cigar. The weight of the cigar lighter, made of beaten silver, felt good in his hand. He lit his cigar and blasted a twirl of Havana blue down the conference table.

Mr. Cutter rose, his eyes glittering. "Gentlemen, it is now time to vote. I think we ought to have more modern management and a new president of Goom Looms who will lead us into the haven of the space-suit contract. There is no reason why a Goom space-suit cannot become the fashion plate of the star-minded. I call for a vote!"

Reginald Goom glared at Cutter. Cutter had a piece of lint on the lapel of his gabardine Goom, an obvious sign of a careless and pedestrian mind.

"Wait—" he said. "I don't think you gentlemen quite have control of the Company. I am voting the shares of Mr. Mullen, my cousin."

"Mr. Mullen's proxy is out of date," said Cutter. "And if you continue lighting cigars at your present frequency, the Company will shortly be bankrupt."

Goom stared down in horror at the three lit cigars in front of him. He was getting senile. The moment he had always feared had come. Not in the privacy of his bachelor quarters, but right at the conference table during the most important moment in all his life.

He raised his eyes to the picture of his father, smiling down from the tan, fashionable walls. "Always keep our textile plant small but adequate," that gentleman had said. "Always remember that the best comes in small quantities. If you can design a new lapel in your time—that is a full life for you. Let the big money go. When the big money comes, a whole troop of money-monkeys follow."

Goom stared down the conference table. He could see the difference on their faces. They were getting the money-monkey look. And he was getting senile. The tiny textile plant was coming, like all good things, to an end.

But Reginald Goom wasn't going out without a battle. "Dick Mullen always sends me a proxy every year," he said.

"Where is it?" asked Cutter.

"Since he is on the moon at present, it will take about two weeks to get it," said Goom. Now his hands *were* trembling. Now he did feel a little sick.

"But you see," said Cutter in a tone one uses on a thick-headed child, "we must accept or reject the space-suit contract by this coming Saturday. We haven't got two weeks."

"I insist that we postpone this Board of Directors meeting for two weeks," said Goom, his heart sinking. Damn! He should've followed up on the proxy thing. He hadn't realized that Cutter had brewed a full-scale revolution under him on this silly Triumphant sub-contract.

He blustered. He pled; he reasoned. It was no use. The vote was taken, and, without Dick Mullen's shares to vote, he lost. Even Johnson and Reed, who were true Gooms in matters of business, went against him. They wouldn't look him in the eye, but they voted against him.

"Mr. Mullen's proxy may be in the mail on the Moon rocket right now," said Goom, truly feeling the desperation of his position. "You can at least give me until Saturday to record the vote of his shares. This is the most important vote in Company history."

"No," said Cutter.

But there Johnson and Reed stood with him. It was an out. They knew it was physically impossible to get the proxies back before Saturday. "There's no harm in re-voting on Saturday," said Johnson, "and I so move." Reed seconded the motion and it carried over Cutter's objections. The money-monkeys were cruel, but they were not brutal. They still wouldn't look him in the face. They knew he was finished and they grasped at self-respect by giving him three more days of control—as if, under the circumstances, that mattered.

They left him sitting alone in the conference room with his three cigars.

Goom stared at the three cigars, one dead, two burning. Just

like the almost-extinct Goom family. Only himself, his niece and that idiot-scientist she had married.

And only three days to get to the moon, get the proxy and get back. . . .

"I sent a rabbit to the moon last night," said Vic Webb to his wife over the morning coffee.

Virginia Webb unstuck her eyes long enough to study her husband's face.

"Bravo."

"The Webb Traveleasy is going to replace space ships entirely," said Vic. "I'm on the right track at last."

"Then you'll have to get away from rabbits," she said. "You've been sending rabbits to the moon for some months now. When do you start on people?"

Vic shook his head. "Maybe ten years, maybe twenty. A new invention takes time. We're still having a little trouble with the skeleton."

"When we're old and gray we'll be worth billions," she said. "But the most useful years of our life are spent giving free rides to rabbits. Why don't you try it on people?"

"I might try it on Uncle Goom," said Vic, "the old buzzard. The other day he refused to lend me the money for the new antennas on the Traveleasy. Five hundred dollars would have done it. That's cigar money to him."

"Leave Uncle Goom alone!" she cried, in surprising passion for that hour of the morning. "He's the only rich relative I've got. Without him I'd be a plain drudge married to a half-baked university professor, and starving."

"This is divorce?" asked Vic.

Virginia subsided. "Don't be a fool. It's only that—well—you're so goddam impractical, if I may coin a term. Your Traveleasy is worth millions in its present state, but only you and that silly Doctor Pitch on the moon know about it."

"Science evolves. It does not explode."

"Yesterday," said Virginia, "the riding lights fell off our aircar. What do you propose to do about that, Doctor Webb? There is also a small matter of two hundred from my last pregnancy still due the hospital. They have threatened to repossess our child. I trust these minor matters will somehow be taken care of."

Vic sighed. He kissed her. "I love you," he said.

She sighed. "But of course," she said. "We will speak no more of it." During the kiss her slim graceful fingers plucked out his slim, graceful wallet. A woman, even a wife, has to live.

From the cloud of cigar smoke, Uncle Goom's voice rang out.

"What's this?" he asked, tapping a part of the machine with his cane.

"Please don't bang the equipment with your cane," said Vic coldly. "That's a printed circuit, and if you jumble it I will be translating rabbit fur into sanskrit."

"So you've been sending rabbits to the moon," said Uncle Goom. He flicked his cigar ash, and Vic with a cry blew the blasphemous ash from the precious machined parts.

"Yes," said Vic, controlling himself. "And I need five hundred dollars to keep on with it. I wouldn't have told you, but I've simply got to have some money."

Reginald Goom recoiled. The expansive gleam in his eye sank to a lesser intensity.

"For that thing? It looks like a television camera."

"It scans," said Vic. "It breaks the flesh down into light rays which it sends through space at the speed, of course, of light. I've figured that I can send a man to the moon for \$68.14 in a matter of seconds. No long waiting. None of that gravity distress. No worry about hitting meteors. \$68.14 instead of the five hundred dollars it costs now. So if you could lend me a little—"

"Wait a minute," said Uncle Goom. "First we're talking about science, and all of a sudden we're talking about money, which slipped in a little fast. Let's get back to your science."

"Substance," sighed Vic, and realizing all that had to be left out and simplified when you dealt with a layman, "seems impervious,

but we know the solidity of matter is an illusion. Within the atom are great empty spaces—" he reverently tapped the chrome finish of his device. "Even in something as hard as metal, there is, relatively, worlds of space between the electron rings and the nucleus—as much space as in our own solar and star system—relative to electron size, of course."

"Yes, space—time," mused Uncle Goom, staring moodily at his watch.

"This has nothing to do with space or time!" cried Vic. "It has to do with reducing matter to its simplest charged particles and beaming them to the moon. A computer memorizes the complex pattern of what we send to the moon. Only recently have we had this kind of sophistication in computers."

"Ah, yes, computers," said Uncle Goom, mouthing a word he had at least seen occasionally in the papers. "Very scientific."

"Have you ever watched a cotton candy machine operate," asked Vic.

Uncle Goom backed off a little. He had never gotten used to Vic's leaps in logic.

"You've seen a man put plain sugar in a cotton candy machine," said Vic. "The sugar is spun out into a fine substance that melts to nothing in your mouth. Yet allowing for normal sugar losses, you have the same product in the end that you started with. Slightly changed in form—but nothing you'd confuse with salt or anything else. The Webb Traveleasy does this. It spins out the charged particles across space, in such a-a-widely-spaced, gossamer way that they all get through. Unlike the cotton candy, the particles are reintegrated at the other end, on the moon, and transportation is thus accomplished."

"Absolutely astounding," said Uncle Goom. "I like it."

"Except the skeleton," said Vic querulously. "My skeletons are always lagging behind and have to be reintegrated later on the moon. That's holding me up."

"What's it like without a skeleton?" asked Uncle Goom.

"Not too bad. But people wouldn't like waiting for their skeletons to arrive. That's why I need five hundred dollars—to develop a

higher frequency sending antenna. At least that'll get me started on the parts. So if you could lend me a little—"

Uncle Goom was silent, frowning. Then he shrugged. "I might at that," he said, "if you'll grant me two conditions."

Vic looked surprised. Usually Uncle Goom struggled like a tiger over lending anybody money.

"N-name them," he said hurriedly.

"First," said Uncle Goom, "that you send me to the moon. Second, you must stop wearing your Goom gabardine in the laboratory and getting acid burns on it. The last is hardly less important than the first. A Goom fabric is a work of art."

Vic stared at him.

"You want to go to the moon?" he asked. "Right now?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Never mind. Say I am getting old and sentimental," sighed Uncle Goom, "and I want to get to the moon right now. I am willing to pay five hundred dollars to you for it. The rest is silence."

Vic shook his head. "I positively won't send you to the moon. Many fine ideas have been ruined by haste—by trying them too soon on people. This is absolutely out of the question."

Uncle Goom shook his head, in his turn. "Why should I throw good money after bad? If you did finish the Traveleasy, it would take a Ph.D. to work it, anyway."

Vic flushed. One of his sore spots was over-complexity in engineering. "*That is a lie.* I could make you or anybody a competent operator in ten minutes."

"If you've built in that kind of simplicity," said Uncle Goom, "it might be practical . . . and I might lend you more money. Prove it."

Already there was a glaze coming over Vic's eyes as his pride in design simplicity was brought into play. "Well, it's really quite simple," he said. "Positively ingenious. Now, first you—"

Uncle Goom listened patiently, hardly inhaling on his cigar. At the end, he sighed and pulled out his check book.

"You talk like you've got something practical," Uncle Goom admitted.

Vic, flushed, felt for his wallet. Easy enough to sell the old boy if you had the time— Vic gave a cry. His wallet was not there.

"Excuse me, Uncle Goom," he said, lips firming. "There's been some skulduggery in this house today!" And he took off, crunching the check in his Goom gabardine side pocket.

Uncle Goom repressed a reprimand about the way the lad treated his suit. He walked around thoughtfully tapping and banging on the machine parts of the Webb Traveleasy. He felt a tizzzy tingling of his nerves. "Poor, tired old nerves," he said. He felt like he was about to drop down in an aircar too fast. The thrill of the unknown. Let Randolph Cutter and his money-monkey crew chortle over the spot he was in. A Goom never gave up. Maybe he would get to the moon and back with the proxy in time after all.

He turned on the switches quickly, felt a moment of horrid uncertainty like a man facing an execution. His eyes fell on his Goom, which he had removed and neatly folded on a chair nearby. "In the name of Goom Looms," he said, and stepped into the warmed up transmitter of the Webb Traveleasy.

"Biologist?" said Dr. Pitch. He was a fat, sad man with a round, sad face. "What would a biologist be doing on the moon? There's no life here under the dome, or anywhere."

Richard Mullen, thin and indignant looking, scowled.

"I," he said, "am a biologist who hates life. My family was in textiles. Instead, I went into science. I don't get along with people too well. I don't get along with animals too well. In fact, I don't care much for growing things."

He drew in a deep breath of Dr. Pitch's oxygen and stared out of the small glass air dome—the lonely, pressurized hut deep in one of the craters of the moon. The pumice waste and space-weathered rocks were restful.

"I came to the moon to invent something better than life, but I

need a vacation. When I heard you were in the next dome to mine and that you had some electronic things going on, I decided to introduce myself, as I did yesterday. I rather like electronics, and I further believe that you are fooling around with a distant relative of mine, a Victor Webb."

Dr. Pitch nodded. "I am working with Webb." For a moment he looked even sadder. "My earth experience was much like yours. My people were in soap, so I took up engineering—human engineering to be exact. I taught a course at Washington Marquette: "How to Be Pleasant." Then they wanted me to teach "The Practical Aspects of Being Happy." And they finally gave me a seminar in "How to Get the Most Out of Everybody." That was when I had my breakdown and wrote "To Hell With Everything," which was a bestseller and enabled me to come to the moon and devote my life to electronics."

Pitch waved a hand at the drab grayness of the moon landscape. "No clatter of traffic. No faculty meetings with simpering faculty politicians tearing red meat off each other. No intense young men trying to suck up knowledge only to be turned into hard dollars for chrome-plated aircars. No—"

Mullen wasn't listening. He stared at a jar, resting on a shelf. "What's that?"

"A rabbit," said Pitch, "and while we're on the subject, couldn't you breathe a little shallower? Oxygen costs money, you know."

"Sorry. That thing jarred me a little."

The object of Mullen's attention was a small vat which held about two quarts. Its present occupant was a puzzle. It was a silver-gray substance of uncertain consistency.

"We're having trouble with skeletons," said Pitch. "That rabbit just came in yesterday."

Two very definite rabbit eyes rose out of the jar on the surface of the creature and peered, rabbit-like, at them. Pitch poked a carrot at the mass, and the eyes vanished. A rabbit mouth appeared and chomped the carrot.

Mullen's hands trembled, but a certain delight shown in his

eyes. "Now *that*," he said, "is life with a little body english to it! What else can it do?"

Pitch sadly poured the rabbit out of the jar. It formed itself into a rabbit-like body and pittered across the floor on rabbitish pseudopods. It formed a nose which twitched and sniffed, and occasionally made eyes for itself to study the geography of the laboratory floor.

"A definite improvement over what we have on earth," breathed Mullen.

"Oh, Webb isn't interested in new mammalian forms," said Pitch. "He wants to transmit people with this machine. Takes the place of space ships."

"How?"

Pitch told him. "However, I can't demonstrate today as there is no transmission scheduled. But as you can see, we are having trouble with the hard calcium of the bones. The skeleton for this rabbit will be along presently, in a week or so. Then I can put it through the transceiver—that is, re-transmit it in the machine right here on the moon—and get my ordinary, garden-variety of rabbit."

Mullen watched the rabbit leap about nimbly, then form itself into something that looked like a cat and climb to a table where there was a pile of carrots.

"Generalized, unspecialized mass for a body," he breathed. "Then if you need a leg, you call on leg-memory and build up as many as you need. If you need an eye, call on eye-memory for it. The rest of the time you can sit around resting, in the form of a puddle!" He turned to Pitch triumphantly. "Why, man, this is the future! Skeletons have been holding back the human race for years. Skeletonless people could live in a house the size of a play house, by increasing their density. They could travel by making themselves into a reasonable facsimile of a bird. They could double intelligence by borrowing body cells to make brain cells during working hours. They could—"

"They won't," sniffed Pitch. "Nobody has ever seen anybody without a skeleton. As a human engineer, I assure you that a man without a skeleton would lose his job; his wife wouldn't like him

any more. He wouldn't look good in a military uniform. He would act in unpredictable ways. This machine isn't any good until we can receive the skeleton along with the rest of the person."

An orange light glowed dimly then brightened. A whole electronic panel began to come to life, winking reds, turning to oranges and greens. There was the deep, pungent odor of ozone around the men.

"Something's happening," Mullen told Pitch, who stared in surprise.

"I have an automatic cycle on the receiver so that I can get sleep if I need to," said Pitch. "But I don't understand. There isn't supposed to be any transmission today."

A pile of something that looked like baker's dough began to form in the vat. There was the faint, but unmistakable odor of cigar smoke about it.

"Now that," said Mullen in wonder, "is a pretty fair-sized rabbit."

But Pitch wasn't watching the vat. He was throwing around his clipboards with abandon. "What's Webb up to?" he cried, his sadness approaching anger. "My carrot supply is already committed to the rabbits I have!"

The pile of dough finished growing finally. It was much, much larger than a rabbit. Mullen leaned forward curiously to examine the substance which was cooling and hardening into a clear, glassy and almost beautiful slab of jello. He poked it with his finger.

Out of the mass two bright blue human eyes appeared, staring at him angrily. Then came a mouth and with it a cigar. The mouth chomped on the cigar. The eyes swiveled around the room and finally came to rest on him again.

"Mullen," snapped a well-remembered voice, "where the hell is my proxy!"

For perhaps the only time in his adult life, Mullen's expression of anger shifted completely to one of wonder.

"Why, Cousin Goom," he gulped. "I'd hardly know you without your skel—" He felt a little faint—"Goom gabardine, that is."

Vic Webb jabbed angrily at his grapefruit. "Your Uncle Goom," he said, "has gone to the moon in the Traveleasy."

"What's wrong with that?" asked Virginia, puzzled. "You took him for five hundred, didn't you?"

"Now he wants to come back," said Vic, kicking the leg of the table.

"Naturally."

"But he's the kind that's always making scenes. He'll get me a lot of bad publicity. That's why I've restricted my transmissions to rabbits. They don't get involved with screwballism. Uncle Goom's skeleton won't arrive on the moon for some time yet, maybe a week or two. If Pitch sends him back, it'll be at least a month before we can re-bone him."

"What happens in the meantime?" asked Virginia innocently. "Do they pin him on a clothes-line like a wet shirt?"

Vic found the question beneath answering. "In the meantime, I'm trying to keep him on the moon, but Pitch says he won't stay. Further, Pitch will quit if I don't take him back. Something about his being allergic to cigar smoke."

"If Uncle Goom used your invention, it was for a good reason," said Virginia. "And the only reason he ever does anything is for the good of the Goom Looms. It must be a crisis, and unless you want us to die poor, you'd better bring him back quickly."

"Publicity now would ruin my life's work," said Vic. "He stays on the moon."

Virginia sat back and studied him coolly. She really hated to have to undercut Vic, but her Goom blood sensed that something of great importance was going forward, and Uncle Goom always knew what was best for Goom Looms and the family fortune involved therein. In other words, it was time to play the woman's eternal role of effecting compromise between the two resolute men who were locked in an unyielding struggle. She concentrated intensely. Her next sentence had to be just right.

She sniffed. "Frankly, I don't think you *can* bring Uncle Goom back," she said. "The machine's too complicated."

The word had a noticeable effect on him. "The Traveleasy com-

plicated?" he said, cheeks flushing. "My circuitry is unimpeachably simple."

She sniffed. She turned negligently to her paper. She could hear him breathing harder.

"Even an idiot could run the Traveleasy," he said, "as proved by your Uncle Goom sending himself to the moon."

"My Uncle Goom," she said quietly, "holds a BA in Weaving from a first-line university, and cannot technically be called an idiot."

Vic rattled his coffee-cup angrily, reaching for the devastating comment. "Even *you* could run the Traveleasy," he said. "But I won't show you."

"Thanks for letting me off the hook, dear. I don't have three solid weeks ahead of me, with nothing to do," she said sweetly, beginning to gather the dishes.

It would work. He would fuss at her all day, but in the end he would be unable to resist her challenge. Virginia was glad that Vic had never taken a course in psychology.

Vic and Virginia brought the vat into Uncle Goom's office.

"Steady," growled the voice from inside the vat. "Steady there, all, you're tickling me."

Miss Kronk, the presidential secretary looked startled. "That sounded like—"

"It is," said Vic, "and what he hopes to accomplish without his skeleton is beyond me. They'll only throw him out of the company."

"They can't," said Goom. "I have Mullen's proxy."

"Well," said Virginia, listening at the closed mahogany double doors, "the Board's meeting now. I can hear them. And somehow we've got to take him in and get him to vote. So how do we do it?"

Miss Kronk bustled around her desk, feeling her responsibilities. "I trust there's nothing wrong with Mr. Goom," she said. "May I look at him?"

Vic lifted off the vat cover and she peered in.

"UUuueel" said Miss Kronk, sliding noisily to the floor in a faint.

The clear jello surged up into a head. "Somebody stop that damn girl from fainting," Uncle Goom ordered, blue eyes dangerous. "And quit talking about me as if I weren't here. Now get me ready for the Board meeting."

Vic laughed ironically. "We can pour you on the table, perhaps, but I'm afraid your friends wouldn't react properly. They'd just pull their investments out of the company."

"He's right," sighed Virginia. "Cutter would make jello out of you—" she bit her tongue. It had been hard trying to keep the team pulling together, and now it was beginning to look futile.

"Nonsense," snapped Uncle Goom. "They may not accept me without my skeleton, but I shall provide myself with one. That's why I had you sneak me in the back way."

"Let's see you make a skeleton!" jeered Vic.

"Any fool who's taken high school biology could answer that one," sneered Uncle Goom. "There is the whole order of creatures that exist with skeletons that are *external*. A lobster, for instance."

"Crustaceans!" breathed Virginia in awe.

Vic shrugged. "If you've got time to grow a shell, grow a shell," he said. "But I still say you'd better wait until the end of March when your own skeleton will be back from the moon and I can re-bone you, as Pitch calls it."

But Uncle Goom was sending out a pseudo-pod to the intercom. "Get me the best Goom gabardine in the plant," he ordered. "And a Goom shirt, tie, gloves, the works!"

"We have, as you know, until noon to accept or reject the offer to sub-contract for Triumphant Textiles on the space-suits," said Cutter, self-satisfied. "My own feeling, gentlemen, is that there's entirely too much talk around here about quality and not enough about making money. So I hope this vote will be the last one!"

Heads nodded in agreement just as Uncle Goom walked in.

True, he wore a hat on his head, and heavy spectacles pouched up a rather sloping brow. True, he wore gloves and a suit

that seemed to bulge a little. And he looked as pale as a man after a heart attack, as limpid as white jello. But who could gainsay the fierce blue eyes and the cigar?

"Gentlemen," he said. "I am here with Cousin Mullen's proxy from the moon, and I vote against the new contract. This ends the meeting."

Cutter stood up again, flushing. "Not quite, Goom," he said. "We've decided that if you did get that proxy, we'd pull out of the company, and I don't think you have enough capital to go it alone. We don't ask much—just the chance to make money."

"And you *shall* make money!" cried Uncle Goom. "While Triumphant Textiles steadily goes broke, because space-suits, gentlemen, are a thing of the past!"

They stared at him in his peculiar get-up and with his wild talk, as if they knew now he'd gone over the brink.

He told them about the Traveleasy. How you could get to the moon for \$68.14, and wear a Goom gabardine until your skeleton arrived. He told them how interesting it was not to have a skeleton. How more and more people would spend more and more time in external Goom skeletons, using their own primarily for blood rebuilding and other biological necessities, perhaps only a few days each month. It took him eight minutes to say all this and by that time the call from Triumphant Textiles was on the phone.

Cutter rose in triumph. "I had expected resistance, Goom," he said, "but not madness. This is the craziest talk of the year! I fear that senile old age is about to lay waste to Goom Looms."

"Suppose I could show you a man, a perfectly happy man without his skeleton," said Uncle Goom easily. "Would this prove to you that mankind is entering a new age, along with Goom Looms?"

Cutter smiled around the room, drawing up the sympathetic smiles of the others at the poor old fool's nonsense. It was a shame to rough-handle the old boy, but he deserved it.

"Show me, Goom," he said. "And I'll be first to change my mind. What would your superman look like? A bowl of jello, I suppose. No, Goom, we're on to your senile fancy-ings—"

Uncle Goom took off his hat.

"—we no longer propose to suffer your childish imaginings—"

Uncle Goom removed his spectacles, his necktie and his coat.

"—your e-ego is r-ruining the c-c-company—"

Uncle Goom took off his shirt.

"we c-can no longer—we can n-n-no l-l-l-longer—"

Uncle Goom started to remove his pants.

"—UUUUUUUUeeeeeeeee!" finished Cutter, fainting.

Uncle Goom poured easily down the table, graciously offering three or four hands here, a cigar-light there, and an occasional slap on the shoulder, leaving a trail of fainting directors. But he remembered to make a special eye to wink at the picture of his father unperturbed on the wall. Perhaps the old boy would have been glad to know that Reginald Goom had done a bit more than design a new lapel in his Goom time.

There have been many stories about the harsh life we may expect to live if superior alien forces take over our world—but few of them have reported on such a life as economically—and effectively—as Avram Davidson does here.

The Certificate

by Avram Davidson

The winter sunrise was still two hours away when Dr. Roger Freeman came to stand in front of the great door. By good fortune—incredibly good fortune—he had not been questioned in his furtive progress from the dormitory. If he had been stopped, or if his answer had been either disbelieved or judged inadequate, he might have been sent back to the dorm for punishment. The punishment would have been over, of course, in time for him to go to work at ten in the morning, but a man could suffer through several thousand eternities of Hell in those few hours. And no more than a low muffled groaning and a subdued convulsive movement of the body to show what was going on. You were able to sleep through it—if it was happening to someone else.

The great door was set well in from the street, and the cutting edge of the wind was broken by it.

Freeman was grateful for that. It was two years ago that he'd applied for a new overcoat, and the one he still had was ragged even then. Perhaps—if this was not to be his year for escape—in another year he would get the coat. He crowded into a corner and tried not to think of the cold.

After a little while another man joined him, then another, then a woman, then a couple. By sunrise there was a long line. They were all willing to risk it, risk punishment for being out before work, or for being late to work. Some merely wanted clothes. Some wanted permission to visit relatives in another locale. You could wait years for either. Or, you could wait years and not get either. And some, like Freeman, hoped against hope for a chance at escape.

Dr. Freeman stared at the door. The design was as intricate as it was incomprehensible. No doubt it made sense to the Hedderans. If you could understand it you might gain some understanding of the nature of their distant home. If you cared. It was fifty years since they had arrived, and men still knew almost nothing about them.

They were here. They would never go away. That was enough.

The man behind Dr. Freeman collapsed. No one paid any attention to him. After a moment there was a high, brief, humming. The man twitched, opened his eyes. He got to his feet.

And then the door opened.

"Proceed in the order," the voice directed—a thick, flat Hedderan voice; harsh, yet glutinous. No one tried to push ahead, the lesson had been too well learned. Dr. Freeman got on the third escalator, rode down two levels. There had been a time when you rode *up*—but that was before the Hedderans came. They didn't like tall buildings—at least it seemed so. They'd never explained—that, or anything else. What they did not like they simply destroyed.

Dr. Freeman looked behind him as he approached the office. There must have been at least a dozen people behind him. They looked at him wolfishly. So few certificates were granted, and he was first in line. He looked away. He'd stayed awake all night in order to *be* the first. No one had the right to resent him. And the next man in line was young. What did he expect . . . ?

The door opened, the voice said, *"Proceed one at a single time."* Fifty years, and the Hedderans still hadn't mastered the language. They didn't have to, of course. Roger Freeman entered the office, took the application form from the slot in the wall-machine found in every office, sat down at the table. When was the last time he had sat in a chair? No matter.

The form was in Hedderan, of course. The voice said, *"Name."* The voice said, *"Number."*

He wrote it down, Roger Freeman . . . 655-673-60-60-2. Idly he glanced at the cluster of Hedderan characters. If one could take

the application form away, with Hedderan questions and English answers, perhaps—if there was time—a key could be found for translating. But it was impossible to take it away. If you spoiled it, you were out. You could apply only once a year. And if you *did* find out how to read their language, what then? Freeman's brother Bob had talked of rebellion—but that was years ago . . . and he didn't like to think what had happened to Bob. And besides, he hadn't *time*—he had to be at work by ten.

From ten in the morning until ten at night (the Hedderans had their own ways of reckoning time) he worked at a machine, pulling hard on levers. Some he had to bend down to reach, some he had to mount steps to reach. Up and down, up and down. He didn't know what the machine did, or even how it worked. And he no longer cared. He no longer cared about anything—except a new overcoat (or, at least, a *newer* one, not worn so thin), and his chances of escape.

Age. Occupation. Previous Occupation. Previous to the arrival of the Hedderans, that was. Fifty years ago. He had been a physician. An obsolete skill. Inside of every man nowadays there was a piece of . . . something . . . presumably it communicated with a machine somewhere deep in the Hedderan quarters. If you broke a bone or bled or even if you just fainted (as the young man behind him in line had), you were set right almost in the second. No one was ill for long—even worn-out organs were regenerated. Too few men had been left alive and, the Hedderans needed those who were left too much to let them sicken or die.

At last the long form was filled out. The harsh voice said, "Now *at once to Office Ten, Level Four.*"

Dr. Freeman hastily obeyed. When they said 'at once,' they meant just that. The punishment might come like a single whip-lash—or it might go on and on. You never knew. Maybe the Hedderans knew. But they never told. The man next behind the outer door scuttled in as Freeman left. The others waited. Not more than three could expect to be processed before it would be time to return to work.

Office Ten, Level Four, asked him the same questions, but in a

different order. He was then directed to Office Five, Level Seventeen. Here his two forms were fed into a machine, returned with markings stamped on them in Hedderan.

"Office Eight, Level Two," the voice said. There, he fed his applications into the slot. After a moment they came back—unmarked.

"Name Roger Freeman. Number 655-673-60-60-2. You have a single time application outstanding. Unpermitted two. You will cancel this one. Or you will cancel that one."

Frantically he searched his mind. What application did he have outstanding? When was this rule made? The overcoat! If he went ahead with this new application and it was refused, he'd have to wait till next year to reinstate the one for the coat. And then more years of waiting . . . It was cold, the dormitory was ill-heated, he had no blanket. His present coat was very worn. Services for humans were minimal.

But he *had* to proceed with this new application. He was first in line . . .

"Speak," the thick, flat voice directed. "Answer. Speak. Now."

Gobbling his words in haste, Freeman said, "I cancel the one outstanding."

"Insert forms."

He did. Waited.

"Proceed to Office Ten, Level Four."

That was the second place he'd been to. A mistake? No matter, he had to go. Once again he entered. And waited.

A grunting noise caught his eye. He looked up, started, cowered. A Hedderan, his baffle-screen turned off, was gazing at him. The blank, grey, faceted eyes in the huge head, and the body, like a deformed foetus . . . then the baffle-screen went on again. Freeman shuddered. One rarely saw them. It had been years.

A piece of paper slid from the machine. He took it up, waiting for the command to proceed—where? Unless it could be accomplished before ten, there was no chance of escape for him this year. None whatever. He stared dully at the strange characters. The cold indifferent voice said, "Name Roger Freeman. Number

655-673-60-60-2. Declared surplus. Application for death certificate is granted. Proceed for certificate to Office One, Level Five. At once."

Tears rolled down Dr. Freeman's cheeks. "At last," he sobbed, joyfully. "At last . . ."

And then he hastily left. He had achieved his escape after all—but only if he got there before ten o'clock.

An almost forgotten folk-fantasy by the Poet Laureate of England, concerning the curse of seals, which ". . . keeps them the way they are, not able to live either in the sea or on the land."

The Sealman

by John Masefield

"The seals is pretty when they do be playing," said the old woman. "Ah, I seen them frisking their tails till you'd think it was rocks with the seas beating on them, the time the storm's on. I seen the merrows of the sea sitting yonder on the dark stone, and they had crowns on them, and they were laughing. The merrows is not good; it's not good to see too many of them. They are beautiful like young men in their shirts playing hurley. They're as beautiful as anything you would be seeing in Amerikey or Australzey, or any place. The seals is beautiful too, going through the water in the young of the day; but they're not so beautiful as them. The seals is no good either. It's a great curse keeps them the way they are, not able to live either in the sea or on the land." She shook her head sadly.

"One time there was a man of the O'Donnells came here, and he was a bad man. A saint in Heaven would have been bothered to find good in him. He died of the fever that came before the Famine. I was a girl then; and if you'd seen the people in them times; there wasn't enough to bury them. The pigs used to eat them in the loanings. And their mouths would be all green where they'd eaten grass from want of food. If you'd seen the houses there was then, indeed, you'd think the place bewitched. But the cabins is all fell in, like yonder, and there's no dancing or fiddling, or anything at all, and all of my friends is gone to Amerikey or Australzey; I've no one at all to bury me, unless it's that humpy one who comes here, and she's as proud as a Jew. She's no cause to be proud, with a hump on her; her father was just a poor man, the same as any.

"This O'Donnell I was telling you. My father was at his wake. And they'd the candles lit, and they were drinking putcheen. My father was nearest the door, and a fear took him, and he got up, with his glass in his hand, and he cried out: 'There's something here is not good.' And another of them said: 'There's something wants to get out.' And another said: 'It's himself wants to go out into the dark night.' And another said: 'For the love of God, open the door.' So my father flung the door open; and, outside, the moon shone down to the sea. And the corpse of the O'Donnell was all blue, and it got up with the sheet knotted on it, and walked out without leaving a track. So they followed it, saying their prayers to Almighty God, and it walked on down to the sea. And when it came to the edge of the sea, the sea was like a flame before it. And it bowed there, three times; and each time it rose up it screamed. And all the seals, and all the merrows, and all them that's under the tides, they came up to welcome it. They called out to the corpse and laughed; and the corpse laughed back, and fell on to the sand. My father and the other men saw the wraith pass from it, into the water, as it fell.

"It was like a little black boy, laughing; with great long arms on him. It was all bald and black; and its hands moved like he was tickling.

"And after that the priest had him buried, like they buried the Old Ones; but the wraith passed into a bull seal. You would be feared to see the like of the bull seal. There was a man of the O'Kanes fired a blessed shilling at him, and the seal roared up at him and tore his arm across. There was marks like black stars on him after till he died. And the bull seal walked like a man at the change of the moon, like a big, tall, handsome man stepping the roads. You'd be feared, sir, if you saw the like. He set his eyes on young Norah O'Hara. Lovely she was. She'd little ways, sir, would draw the heart out of an old bachelor. Wasn't it a great curse he should take her when there was old hags the like of Mary that has no more beauty than a withered broom that you wouldn't be bothered to mend, or a done-out old gather-up of a duck that a hungry dog would blush to be biting? Still, he took Norah.

"She had a little son, and the little son was a sealman; the priest wouldn't sign him with the cross. When Norah died he used always to be going to the sea; he would always be swimming. He'd little soft brown hair, like a seal's, the prettiest you would be seeing. He used to talk to the seals. My father was coming home one night from Carnmore, and he saw the little sealman in the sea; and the seals were playing with him, singing songs. But my father was feared to hear; he ran away. They stoned the sealman, whiles, after that; but whiles they didn't stone it. They had a kindness for it, although it had no holy water on it. It was a very young thing to be walking the world, and it was a beautiful wee thing, with its eyes so pretty; so it grew up to be a man.

"Them that live in the water, they have ways of calling people. Them who passed this sealman, they felt the call in their hearts. Indeed, if you passed the sealman, stepping the roads, you would get a queer twist from the way he looked at you.

"And he set his love on a young girl of the O'Keefes, a little young girl with no more in her than the flower on its stalk. You would see them in the loanings coming home, or in the bright of the day going. There was a strong love was on them two young things; it was like the love of the Old Ones that took nine deaths to kill. They would be telling Kate it was not right she should set her love on one who wasn't like ourselves; but there's few indeed as the young'll listen. They are all for pleasure, all for pleasure, before they are withered hags. And at last they shut her up at home, to keep her from seeing him. And he came by her cabin to the west of the road, calling. There was a strong love came up to her at that, and she put down her sewing on the table, and 'Mother,' she says, 'there's no lock, and no key, and no bolt, and no door. There's no iron, nor no stone, nor anything at all will keep me this night from the man I love.' And she went out into the moonlight to him, there by the bush where the flowers is pretty, beyond the river. And he says to her: 'You are all of the beauty of the world, will you come where I go, over the waves of the sea?' And she says to him: 'My treasure and strength,' she says, 'I would follow you on the frozen hills, my feet bleeding.'

"Then they went down into the sea together, and the moon made a track upon the sea, and they walked down it; it was like a flame before them. There was no fear at all on her, only a great love like the love of the Old Ones, that was stronger than the touch of the fool. She had a little white throat, and little cheeks like flowers, and she went down into the sea with her man, who wasn't a man at all. She was drowned, of course. It's like he never thought that she wouldn't bear the sea like himself.

"When it come light they saw the sealman sitting yonder on the rock, and she lying by him dead, with her face as white as a flower. He was crying and beating her hands to bring life to her. It would have drawn pity from a priest to hear him though he wasn't Christian. And at last, when he saw that she was drowned, he took her in his arms and slipped into the sea like a seal. And he swam, carrying her, with his head up, laughing and laughing and laughing, and no one ever saw him again at all."

For some years now Poul Anderson has been one of *Fantasy and Science Fiction's* most steadily reliable contributors. He has written novels, of course, but he has a special affection for the short story and novelet forms, and a special story-telling talent, which combine to bring him back regularly to our pages. The example here is one of high and salty adventure, concerning an encounter between a great aerial power of a reviving future and an ingenious naval force from halfway around an otherwise peaceful world.

The Sky People

by Poul Anderson

The Rover Fleet got there just before sunrise. From its height, five thousand feet, the land was bluish gray, smoked with mists. Irrigation canals caught the first light as if they were full of mercury. Westward the ocean gleamed, its far edge dissolved into purple and a few stars.

Loklann sunna Holber leaned over the gallery rail of his flagship and pointed a telescope at the city. It sprang to view as a huddle of walls, flat roofs, and square watchtowers. The cathedral spires were tinted rose by a hidden sun. No barrage balloons were up. It must be true what rumor said, that the Perio had abandoned its outlying provinces to their fate. So the portable wealth of Meyco would have flowed into S' Antón, for safekeeping—which meant that the place was well worth a raid. Loklann grinned.

Robra sunna Stam, the *Buffalo's* mate, spoke. "Best we come down to about two thousand," he suggested. "Just to be sure the men aren't blown sideways, to the wrong side of the town walls."

"Aye." The skipper nodded his helmeted head. "Two thousand, so be it."

Their voices seemed oddly loud up here, where only the wind and a creak of rigging had broken silence. The sky around the rovers was dusky immensity, tinged red gold in the east. Dew lay on the gallery deck. But when the long wooden horns blew signals, it

was somehow not an interruption, nor was the distant shouting of orders from other vessels, thud of crew fleet, clatter of windlasses and hand-operated compressor pumps. To a Sky Man, those sounds belonged in the upper air.

Five great craft spiraled smoothly downward. The first sunrays flashed off gilt figureheads, bold on sharp gondola prows, and rioted along the extravagant designs painted on gas bags. Sails and rudders were unbelievably white across the last western darkness.

"Hullo, there," said Loklann. He had been studying the harbor through his telescope. "Something new. What could it be?"

He offered the tube to Robra, who held it to his remaining eye. Within the glass circle lay a stone dock and warehouses, centuries old, from the days of the Perio's greatness. Less than a fourth of their capacity was used now. The normal clutter of wretched little fishing craft, a single coasting schooner . . . and yes, by Oktai the Stormbringer, a monster thing, bigger than a whale, seven masts that were impossibly tall!

"I don't know." The mate lowered the telescope. "A foreigner? But where from? Not in all this continent—"

"I never saw any arrangement like that," said Loklann. "Square sails on the topmasts, fore-and-aft below." He stroked his short beard. It burned like spun copper in the morning light; he was one of the fairhaired blue-eyed men, rare even among the Sky People and unheard of elsewhere. "Of course," he said, "we're no experts on water craft. We only see them in passing." A not unamiable contempt rode his words: sailors made good slaves, at least, but naturally the only fit vehicle for a fighting man was a rover abroad and a horse at home.

"Probably a trader," he decided. "We'll capture it if possible."

He turned his attention to more urgent problems. He had no map of S' Antón, had never even seen it before. This was the farthest south any Sky People had yet gone plundering, and almost as far as any had ever visited—in bygone days aircraft were still too primitive and the Perio too strong. Thus Loklann must scan the city from far above, through drifting white vapors, and make his

plan on the spot. Nor could it be very complicated, for he had only signal flags and a barrel-chested hollerer with a megaphone to pass orders to the other vessels.

"That big plaza in front of the temple," he murmured. "Our contingent will land there. Let the *Stormcloud* men tackle that big building east of it . . . see . . . it looks like a chief's dwelling. Over there, along the north wall, typical barracks and parade ground—*Coyote* can deal with the soldiers. Let the *Witch of Heaven* men land on the docks, seize the seaward gun emplacements and that strange vessel, then join the attack on the garrison. *Fire Elk's* crew should land inside the east city gate and send a detachment to the south gate, to bottle in the civilian population. Having occupied the plaza, I'll send reinforcements wherever they're needed. All clear?"

He snapped down his goggles. Some of the big men crowding about him wore chain armor, but he preferred a cuirass of harden leather, Mong style; it was nearly as strong and a lot lighter. He was armed with a pistol, but had more faith in his battle ax. An archer could shoot almost as fast as a gun, as accurately—and firearms were getting fabulously expensive to operate as sulfur sources dwindled.

He felt a tightness which was like being a little boy again, opening presents on Midwinter Morning. Oktai knew what treasures he would find, of gold, cloth, tools, slaves, of battle and high deeds and eternal fame. Possibly death. Someday he was sure to die in combat: he had sacrificed so much to his josses, they wouldn't grudge him war-death and a chance to be reborn as a Sky Man.

"Let's go!" he said.

He sprang up on a gallery rail and over. For a moment the world pinwheeled, now the city was on top and now again his *Buffalo* streaked past. Then he pulled the ripcord and his harness slammed him to steadiness. Around him it bloomed with scarlet parachutes. He gauged the wind and tugged a line, guiding himself down.

II

Don Miwel Carabán, calde of S' Antón d' Inio, arranged a lavish feast for his Maurai guests. It was not only that this was a historic occasion, which might even mark a turning point in the long decline. (Don Miwel, being that rare combination, a practical man who could read, knew that the withdrawal of Perio troops to Brasil twenty years ago was not a "temporary adjustment." They would never come back. The outer provinces were on their own.) But the strangers must be convinced that they had found a nation rich, strong, and basically civilized: that it was worthwhile visiting the Meycan coasts to trade, ultimately to make alliance against the northern savages.

The banquet lasted till nearly midnight. Though some of the old irrigation canals had choked up and never been repaired, so that cactus and rattlesnake housed in abandoned pueblos, Meyco Province was still fertile. The slant-eyed Mong horsemen from Tekkas had killed off innumerable peons when they raided five years back; wooden pitchforks and obsidian hoes were small use against saber and arrow. It would be another decade before population was back to normal and the periodic famines resumed. Thus Don Miwel offered many courses, beef, spiced ham, olives, fruits, wines, nuts, coffee, which last the Sea People were unfamiliar with and didn't much care for, et cetera. Entertainment followed—music, jugglers, a fencing exhibition by some of the young nobles.

At this point the surgeon of the *Dolphin*, who was rather drunk, offered to show an Island dance. Muscular beneath tattoos, his brown form went through a series of contortions which pursed the lips of the dignified Dons. Miwel himself remarked, "It reminds me somewhat of our peons' fertility rites," with a strained courtesy that suggested to Captain Ruori Rangi Lohannaso that peons had an altogether different and not very nice culture.

The surgeon threw back his queue and grinned. "Now let's bring

the ship's wahines ashore to give them a real hula," he said in Maurai-Inglist.

"No," answered Ruori. "I fear we may have shocked them already. The proverb goes, 'When in the Solmon Islands, darken your skin.'"

"I don't think they know how to have *any* fun," complained the doctor.

"We don't yet know what the taboos are," warned Ruori. "Let us be as grave, then, as these spike-bearded men, and not laugh or make love until we are back on shipboard among our wahines."

"But it's stupid! Shark-toothed Nan eat me if I'm going to—"

"Your ancestors are ashamed," said Ruori. It was about as sharp a rebuke as you could give a man whom you didn't intend to fight. He softened his tone to take out the worst sting, but the doctor had to shut up. Which he did, mumbling an apology and retiring with his blushes to a dark corner beneath faded murals.

Ruori turned back to his host. "I beg your pardon, S'ñor," he said, using the local tongue. "My men's command of Spañol is even less than my own."

"Of course." Don Miwel's lean black-cald form made a stiff little bow. It brought his sword up, ludicrously like a tail. Ruori heard a smothered snort of laughter from one of his officers. And yet, thought the captain, were long trousers and ruffled shirt any worse than sarong, sandals, and clan tattoos? Different customs, no more. You had to sail the Maurai Federation, from Awaii to his own N'Zealann and west to Mlaya, before you appreciated how big this planet was and how much of it a mystery.

"You speak our language most excellently, S'ñor," said Doñita Tresa Carabán. She smiled. "Perhaps better than we, since you studied texts centuries old before embarking, and the Spañol has changed greatly since."

Ruori smiled back. Don Miwel's daughter was worth it. The rich black dress caressed a figure as good as any in the world; and, while the Sea People paid less attention to a woman's face, he saw that hers was proud and well-formed, her father's eagle beak softened to a curve, luminous eyes and hair the color of midnight

oceans. It was too bad these Meycans—the nobles, at least—thought a girl should be reserved solely for the husband they eventually picked for her. He would have liked her to swap her pearls and silver for a lei and go out in a ship's canoe, just the two of them, to watch the sunrise and make love.

However—

"In such company," he murmured, "I am stimulated to learn the modern language as fast as possible."

She refrained from coquetting with her fan, a local habit the Sea People found alternately hilarious and irritating. But her lashes fluttered. They were very long, and her eyes, he saw, were gold-flecked green. "You are learning cab'llero manners just as fast, S'ñor," she said.

"Do not call our language 'modern', I pray you," interrupted a scholarly looking man in a long robe. Ruori recognized Bispo Don Carlos Ermosillo, a high priest of that Esu Carito who seemed cognate with the Maurai Lesu Haristi. "Not modern, but corrupt. I too have studied old books, printed before the War of Judgment. Our ancestors spoke the true Spañol. Our version of it is as distorted as our present-day society." He sighed. "But what can one expect, when even among the well-born, not one in ten can write his own name?"

"There was more literacy in the high days of the Perio," said Don Miwel. "You should have visited us a hundred years ago, S'ñor Captain, and seen what our race was capable of."

"Yet what was the Perio itself but a successor state?" asked the Bispo bitterly. "It unified a large area, gave law and order for a while, but what did it create that was new? Its course was the same sorry tale as a thousand kingdoms before, and therefore the same judgment has fallen on it."

Doñita Tresa crossed herself. Even Ruori, who held a degree in engineering as well as navigation, was shocked. "Not atomics?" he exclaimed.

"What? Oh. The old weapons, which destroyed the old world. No, of course not." Don Carlos shook his head. "But in our more limited way, we have been as stupid and sinful as the legendary

forefathers, and the results have been parallel. You may call it human greed or el Dío's punishment as you will; I think the two mean much the same thing."

Ruori looked closely at the priest. "I should like to speak with you further, S'ñor," he said, hoping it was the right title. "Men who know history, rather than myth, are rare these days."

"By all means," said Don Carlos. "I should be honored."

Doñita Tresa shifted on light, impatient feet. "It is customary to dance," she said.

Her father laughed. "Ah, yes. The young ladies have been getting very impatient, I am sure. Time enough to resume formal discussions tomorrow, S'ñor Captain. Now let the music begin!"

He signalled. The orchestra struck up. Some instruments were quite like those of the Maurai, others wholly unfamiliar. The scale itself was different . . . they had something like it in Stralia, but—A hand fell on Ruori's arm. He looked down at Tresa. "Since you do not ask me to dance," she said, "may I be so immodest as to ask you?"

"What does 'immodest' mean?" he inquired.

She blushed and tried to explain, without success. Ruori decided it was another local concept which the Sea People lacked. By that time the Meycan girls and their cavaliers were out on the ballroom floor. He studied them for a moment. "The motions are unknown to me," he said, "but I think I could soon learn."

She slipped into his arms. It was a pleasant contact, even though nothing would come of it. "You do very well," she said after a minute. "Are all your folk so graceful?"

Only later did he realize it was a compliment for which he should have thanked her; being an Islander, he took it at face value as a question and replied, "Most of us spend a great deal of time on the water. A sense of balance and rhythm must be developed or one is likely to fall into the sea."

She wrinkled her nose. "Oh stop," she laughed. "You're as solemn as S' Osé in the cathedral."

Ruori grinned back. He was a tall young man, brown as all his race but with the gray eyes which many bore in memory of Ingliss

ancestors. Being a N'Zealanner, he was not tattooed as lavishly as some Federation men. On the other hand, he had woven a whale-bone filigree into his queue, his sarong was the finest batik, and he had added thereto a fringed shirt. His knife, without which a Maurai felt obscenely helpless, was in contrast: old, shabby until you saw the blade, a tool.

"I must see this god S' Osé," he said. "Will you show me? Or no, I would not have eyes for a mere statue."

"How long will you stay?" she asked.

"As long as we can. We are supposed to explore the whole Meycan coast. Hitherto the only Maurai contact with the Meriken continent has been one voyage from Awaii to Californi. They found desert and a few savages. We have heard from Okkaidan traders that there are forests still further north, where yellow and white men strive against each other. But what lies south of Californi was unknown to us until this expedition was sent out. Perhaps you can tell us what to expect in Su-Merika."

"Little enough by now," she sighed, "even in Brasil."

"Ah, but lovely roses bloom, in Meyco."

Her humor returned. "And flattering words in N'Zealann," she chuckled.

"Far from it. We are notoriously straightforward. Except, of course, when yarning about voyages we have made."

"What yarns will you tell about this one?"

"Not many, lest all the young men of the Federation come crowding here. But I will take you aboard my ship, Doñita, and show you to the compass. Thereafter it will always point toward S' Antón d' Inio. You will be, so to speak, my compass rose."

Somewhat to his surprise, she understood, and laughed. She led him across the floor, supple between his hands.

Thereafter, as the night wore on, they danced together as much as decency allowed, or a bit more, and various foolishness which concerned no one else passed between them. Toward sunrise the orchestra was dismissed and the guests, hiding yawns behind well-bred hands, began to take their departure.

"How dreary to stand and receive farewells," whispered Tresa.

"Let them think I went to bed already." She took Ruori's hand and slipped behind a column and so out on to a balcony. An old serving woman, stationed to act as duenna for couples that wandered out, had wrapped up in her mantle against the cold and fallen asleep. Otherwise the two were alone among jasmines. Mists floated around the palace and blurred the city; far off rang the "*Todos buen*" of pikemen tramping the outer walls. Westward the balcony faced darkness, where the last stars glittered. The seven tall topmasts of the *Maurai Dolphin* caught the earliest sun and glowed.

Tresa shivered and stood close to Ruori. They did not speak for a while.

"Remember us," she said at last, very low. "When you are back with your own happier people, do not forget us here."

"How could I?" he answered, no longer in jest.

"You have so much more than we," she said wistfully. "You have told me how your ships can sail unbelievably fast, almost into the wind. How your fishers always fill their nets, how your whale ranchers keep herds that darken the water, how you even farm the ocean for food and fiber and—" she fingered the shimmering material of his shirt. "You told me this was made by craft out of fishbones. You told me that every family has its own spacious house and every member of it, almost, his own boat . . . that even small children on the loneliest island can read, and own printed books . . . that you have none of the sicknesses which destroy us . . . that no one hungers and all are free— Oh, do not forget us, you on whom el Dío has smiled!"

She stopped, then, embarrassed. He could see how her head lifted and nostrils dilated, as if resenting him. After all, he thought, she came from a breed which for centuries had given, not received charity.

So he chose his words with care: "It has been less our virtue than our good fortune, Doñita. We suffered less than most in the War of Judgment, and the fact of Judgment, and the fact of our being chiefly Islanders prevented our population from outrunning the sea's rich ability to feed us. So we—no, we did not retain any lost

ancestral arts. There are none. But we did re-create an ancient attitude, a way of thinking, which has made the difference—science.”

She crossed herself. “The atom!” she breathed, drawing from him.

“No, no, Doñita,” he protested. “So many nations we have discovered lately believe that science was the cause of the old world’s ruin. Or else they think that it was a collection of cut-and-dried formulas for making tall buildings or talking at a distance. But neither belief is true. The scientific method is only a means of learning. It is a . . . a perpetual starting afresh. And that is why you people here in Meyco can help us as much as we can help you, why we have sought you out and will come knocking hopefully at your doors again in the future.”

She frowned, though something began to glow within her. “I do not understand,” she said.

He cast about for an example. At last he pointed to a series of small holes in the balcony rail. “What used to be here?” he asked.

“Why . . . I do not know. It has always been like that.”

“I think I can tell you. I have seen similar things elsewhere. It was a wrought-iron grille. But it was pulled out a long time ago and made into weapons or tools. No?”

“Quite likely,” she admitted. “Iron and copper have grown very scarce. We have to send caravans across the whole land, to Támico ruins, in great peril from bandits and barbarians, to fetch our metal. Time was when there were iron rails within a kilometer of this place. Don Carlos has told me.”

He nodded. “Just so. The ancients exhausted the world. They mined the ores, burned the oil and coal, eroded the land until there was nothing left. I exaggerate, of course. There are still mineral deposits here and there. But not enough. The old civilization used up all the capital, so to speak. Now sufficient forest and soil have come back so the world could try to reconstruct the machine culture—except that there aren’t enough minerals and fuels. For centuries men have been forced to tear up the old artifacts, if there was to be any metal at all. By and large, the knowl-

edge of the ancients hasn't been lost; it has simply become unusable, because we are so much poorer than they."

He leaned forward, earnestly. "But knowledge and discovery do not depend on wealth," he said. "Perhaps because we did not have so much metal to cannibalize in the Islands, we turned elsewhere. The scientific method is just as applicable to wind and sun and living matter as it was to oil, iron, or uranium. By studying genetics we learned how to create seaweeds, plankton, fish that would serve our purposes. Scientific forest management gives us adequate timber, organic-synthesis bases, some fuel. The sun pours down energy which we know how to concentrate and use. Wood, ceramics, even stone can replace metal for most purposes. The wind, through such principles as the airfoil or the Venturi law or the Hilsch tube, supplies force, heat, refrigeration; the tides can be harnessed. Even in its present early stage, paramathematical psychology helps control population, as well as— No, I am talking like an engineer now, falling into my own language. I apologize.

"What I wanted to say was, that if we can only have the help of other people, such as yourselves, on a world-wide scale, we can match our ancestors, or surpass them . . . not in their own ways, which were often short-sighted and wasteful, but in achievements uniquely ours—"

His voice trailed off. She wasn't listening. She stared over his head, into the air, and horror stood on her face.

Then trumpets howled on battlements, and the cathedral bells crashed to life.

"What the nine devils!" Ruori turned on his heel and looked up. The zenith had become quite blue. Lazily over S' Antón floated five orca shapes. The new sun glared off a jagged heraldry painted along their flanks. He estimated dizzily that each of them must be three hundred feet long.

Blood-colored things petaled out below them and drifted down upon the city.

"The Sky People!" said a small broken croak behind him. "Sant'sima Marí, pray for us now!"

III

Loklann hit flagstones, rolled over, and bounced to his feet. Beside him a carved horseman presided over fountain waters. For just an instant he admired the stone, almost alive; they had nothing like that in Canyon, Zona, Corado, any of the mountain kingdoms. And the temple facing this plaza was white skywardness.

The square had been busy, farmers and handicrafters setting up their booths for a market day. Most of them scattered in noisy panic. But one big man roared, snatched up a stone hammer, and dashed in his rags to meet Loklann. He was covering the flight of a young woman, probably his wife, who held a baby in her arms. Through the shapeless sack dress Loklann saw that her figure wasn't bad. She would fetch a price when the Mong slave dealer next visited Canyon. So could her husband, but there wasn't time now, still encumbered with a chute—Loklann whipped out his pistol and fired. The man fell to one knee, gaped at the blood seeping between fingers clutched to his belly, and collapsed. Loklann flung off his harness. His boots thudded after the woman. She shrieked when fingers closed on her arm and tried to wriggle free, but the brat hampered her. Loklann shoved her toward the temple. Robra was already on its steps.

"Post a guard!" yelled the skipper. "We may as well keep all the prisoners in here, till we're ready to plunder it."

An old man in priest's robes tottered to the door. He held up one of the cross-shaped Meycan josses, as if to bar the way. Robra brained him with an ax blow, kicked the body off the stairs, and urged the woman inside.

It sleeted armed men. Loklann winded his oxhorn bugle, rallying them. A counterattack could be expected any minute. . . . Yes, now.

A troop of Meycan cavalry clanged into view. They were young, proud-looking men in baggy pants, leather breastplate and plumed helmet, blowing cloak, fire-hardened wooden lances but steel sabres. Very much like the yellow nomads of Tekkas, whom they

had fought for centuries. But so had the Sky People. Loklann pounded to the head of his line, where his standard bearer had raised the Lightning Flag. Half the *Buffalo's* crew fitted together sections of pike tipped with edged ceramic, grounded the butts, and waited. The charge crested upon them. Their pikes slanted down. Some horses spitted themselves, others reared back screaming. The pikemen jabbed at their riders. The second paratroop line stepped in, ax and sword and hamstringing knife. For a few minutes murder boiled. The Meycans broke. They did not flee, but they retreated in confusion. And then the Canyon bows began to snap.

Presently only dead and hurt cluttered the square. Loklann moved briskly among the latter. Those who weren't too badly wounded were hustled into the temple. Might as well collect all possible slaves and cull them out later.

From afar he heard a dull boom. "Cannon," said Robra, joining him. "At the army barracks."

"Well, let the artillery have its fun, till our boys get in among 'em," said Loklann sardonically.

"Sure, sure." Robra looked nervous. "I wish they'd let us hear from them, though. Just standing around here isn't so good."

"It won't be long," predicted Loklann.

Nor was it. A runner with a broken arm staggered to him. "*Stormcloud*," he gasped. "The big building you sent us against . . . full of swordsmen . . . they repulsed us at the door—"

"Huh! I thought it was just the king's house," said Loklann. He laughed. "Well, maybe the king was giving a party. Come on, then, I'll go see for myself. Robra, take over here." His finger swept out thirty men to accompany him. They jogged down streets empty and silent except for their own bootfalls and weapon-jingle. The housefolk must be huddled terrified behind those blank walls. So much the easier to round them up later, when the fighting was done and the looting began.

A roar broke loose. Loklann led a dash around a last corner. Opposite him he saw the palace, an old building, red-tiled roof and mellow walls and many glass windows. The *Stormcloud* men were

fighting at the main door. Their dead and wounded from the last attack lay thick.

Loklann took in the situation at a glance. "It wouldn't occur to those lardheads to send a detachment through some side entrance, would it?" he groaned. "Jonak, take fifteen of our boys and batter in a lesser door and hit the rear of that line. The rest of you help me keep it busy meanwhile."

He raised his red-spattered ax. "A Canyon!" he yelled. "A Canyon!" His followers bellowed behind him and they ran to battle.

The last charge had just reeled away bloody and breathless. Half a dozen Meycans stood in the wide doorway. They were all nobles: grim men with goatees and waxed mustaches, in formal black, red cloaks wrapped as a shield on their left arms and long slim swords in their right hands. Behind them stood others, ready to take the place of the fallen.

"A Canyon!" shouted Loklann as he rushed.

"*Quel Dío wela!*" cried a tall grizzled Don. A gold chain of office hung around his neck. His blade snaked forth.

Loklann flung up his ax and parried. The Don was fast, riposting with a lunge that ended on the raider's breast. But hardened six-ply leather turned the point. Loklann's men crowded on either side, reckless of thrusts, and hewed. He struck the enemy sword, it spun from the owner's grasp. "*Ah, no Don Miwel!*" cried a young person beside the calde. The older man snarled and threw out his hands and somehow clamped them on Loklann's ax. He yanked it away with a troll's strength. Loklann stared into eyes that said death. Don Miwel raised the ax. Loklann drew his pistol and fired point blank.

As Don Miwel toppled, Loklann caught him, pulled off the gold chain, and threw it around his own neck. Straightening, he met a savage thrust. It glanced off his helmet. He got his ax back, planted his feet firmly, and smote.

The defending line buckled.

Clamor lifted behind Loklann. He turned and saw weapons gleam beyond his own men's shoulders. With a curse he realized—there had been more people in the palace than these holding the

main door. The rest had sallied out the rear and were now on his back!

A point pierced his thigh. He felt no more than sting, but rage flapped black before his eyes. "Be reborn as the swine you are!" he roared. Half unaware, he thundered loose. Somehow he cleared a space for himself, lurched aside and oversaw the battle.

The newcomers were mostly palace guards, judging from their gaily striped uniforms, pikes and machetes. But there were allies, a dozen men such as Loklann had never seen or heard of. They had the brown skin and black hair of Injuns, but their faces were more like a white man's; intricate blue designs covered their bodies, which were clad only in wrap-arounds and flower wreaths. They wielded knives and clubs with wicked skill.

Loklann tore his trouser leg open to look at his wound. It wasn't much. More serious was the beating his men were taking. He saw Mork sunna Brenn rush with uplifted sword at one of the dark strangers, a big man who had added a rich-looking blouse to his skirt. Mork had killed four men at home for certain, in lawful fights, and no one knew how many abroad. The dark man waited, a knife between his teeth, hands hanging loose. As the sword came down, the dark man simply wasn't there. Grinning around his knife, he chopped at the sword wrist with the edge of a hand. Loklann distinctly heard bones crack. Mork yelled. The foreigner hit him in the Adam's apple. Mork went to his knees, spat blood, caved in, and was still. Another Sky Man charged, ax aloft. The stranger—somehow—avoided the weapon, caught the moving body on his hip, and helped it along. The Sky Man hit the pavement with his head and did not move again.

Now Loklann saw that the newcomers were a ring around others who did not fight. Women. By Oktai and man-eating Ulagu, these bastards were leading out all the women in the palace! And the fight against them had broken up, surly raiders stood back holding their wounds.

Loklann ran forward. "A Canyon! A Canyon!" he shouted. "Ruori Rangi Lohannaso," said the big stranger politely. He rapped a string of orders. His party began to move away.

"Hit them, you scum!" bawled Loklann. His men rallied and straggled after. Rearguard pikes prodded them back. Loklann led a rush to the front of the hollow square.

The big man saw him coming; gray eyes focused on the calde's chain and became full of winter. "So you killed Don Miwel," said Ruori in Español. Loklann understood him, having learned the tongue from prisoners and concubines during many raids further north. "You lousy son of a skua."

Loklann's pistol came out. Ruori's hand blurred. Suddenly the knife stood in the Sky Man's right biceps. He dropped his gun. "I'll want that back!" shouted Ruori. Then, to his followers: "Come, to the ship."

Loklann stared at blood rivering down his arm. He heard a clatter as the refugees broke through the weary Canyon line. Jonak's party appeared in the main door—which was now empty, its surviving defenders having left with Ruori.

A man approached Loklann, who still regarded his arm. "Shall we go after 'em, skipper?" he said, almost timidly. "Jonak can lead us after 'em."

"No," said Loklann.

"But they must be escorting a hundred women. A lot of young women too."

Loklann shook himself, like a dog coming out of a deep cold stream. "No. I want to find the medic and get this wound stitched. Then we'll have a lot else to do. We can settle with those outlanders later, if the chance comes. Man, we've a city to sack!"

IV

There were dead men scattered on the wharfs, some burned. They looked oddly small beneath the warehouses, like rag dolls tossed away by some weeping child. Cannon fumes lingered to bite nostrils.

Atel Hamid Seraio, the mate, who had been left aboard the *Dolphin* with the enlisted crew, led a band to meet Ruori. His

salute was in the Island manner, so casual that even at this moment some of the Meycans looked shocked. "We were about to go after you, captain," he said.

Ruori looked toward that forest which was the *Dolphin's* rig. "What happened here?" he asked.

"A band of those devils landed up that way, near the battery. They took the emplacements while we were still wondering what it was all about. Some of them went off toward that racket in the north quarter, I believe where the army lives. But the rest of the gang attacked us. Well, with our gunwale ten feet above the dock, and us trained to repel pirates, they didn't have much luck. I gave them a dose of flame."

Ruori winced from the blackened corpses. Doubtless they had deserved it, but he didn't like the idea of pumping burning blubber oil across live men.

"Too bad they didn't try it from the seaward side," added Atel with a sigh. "We've got such a lovely harpoon catapult. I used one just like it several years ago off Hinja, when a Sinese buccaneer came too close. His junk sounded like a whale."

"Men aren't whales!" snapped Ruori.

"All right, captain, all right, all right." Atell backed away from his violence, a little frightened. "No ill-speaking meant."

Ruori recollected himself and folded his hands. "I spoke in needless anger," he said formally. "I laugh at myself."

"It's nothing, captain. As I was saying, we beat them off and they finally withdrew. I imagine they'll be back with reinforcements. What shall we do?"

"That's what I don't know," said Ruori in a bleak tone. He turned to the Meycans, who stood with stricken uncomprehending faces. "Your pardon is prayed, Dons and Doñitas," he said in *Spañol*. "He was only relating to me what had happened."

"Don't apologize!" Tresa Carabán spoke, stepping out ahead of the men. Some of them looked a bit offended, but they were too tired and stunned to reprove her forwardness, and to Ruori it was only natural that a woman act as freely as a man. "You saved our lives, captain. More than our lives."

He wondered what was worse than death, then nodded. Slavery, of course, ropes and whips and a lifetime's unfree toil in a strange land. His eyes dwelt upon her, the long hair disheveled past smooth shoulders, gown ripped, weariness and a streak of tears across her face. He wondered if she knew her father was dead. She held herself straight and regarded him with an odd defiance.

"We are uncertain what to do," he said awkwardly. "We are only fifty men. Can we help your city?"

A young nobleman, swaying on his feet, replied: "No. The city is done. You can take these ladies to safety, that is all."

Tresa protested: "You are not surrendering already, S'ñor Dónojul!"

"No, Doñita," the young man breathed. "But I hope I can be shriven before returning to fight, for I am a dead man."

"Come aboard," said Ruori curtly.

He led the way up the gangplank. Liliu, one of the ship's five wahines, ran to meet him. She threw arms about his neck and cried, "I feared you were all slain!"

"Not yet." Ruori disengaged her as gently as possible. He noticed Tresa standing stiff, glaring at them both. Puzzlement came—did these curious Meycans expect a crew to embark on a voyage of months without taking a few girls along?—then he decided that the wahines' clothing, being much like his men's, was against local mores. To Nan with their silly prejudices. But it hurt that Tresa drew away from him.

The other Meycans stared about them. Not all had toured the ship when she first arrived. They looked in bewilderment at lines and spars, down fathoms of deck to the harpoon catapult, capstans, bowsprit, and back at the sailors. The Maurai grinned encouragingly. So far most of them looked on this as a lark. Men who skindove after sharks, for fun, or who sailed outrigger canoes alone across a thousand ocean miles to pay a visit, were not put out by a little fight.

But they had not talked with grave Don Miwel and merry Don Wan and gentle Bispo Ermosillo, and then seen those people dead on a dance floor, thought Ruori in bitterness.

The Meycan women huddled together, ladies and servants, to weep among each other. The palace formed a solid rank around them. The nobles, and Tresa, followed Ruori up on the poop deck.

"Now," he said, "let us talk. Who are these bandits?"

"The Sky People," whispered Tresa.

"I can see that." Ruori cocked an eye on the aircraft patrolling overhead. They had the sinister beauty of as many barracuda. Here and there columns of smoke reached up toward them. "But *who* are they? Where from?"

"They are Nor-Merikans," she answered in a dry little voice, as if afraid to give it color. "From the wild highlands around the Corado River, the Grand Canyon it has cut for itself—mountaineers. There is a story that they were driven from the eastern plains by Mong invaders, a long time ago; but they grew strong again in the hills and deserts, so they have defeated some Mong tribes and become friendly with others. For a hundred years they have harried our northern borders. This is the first time they have ventured so far south. We never expected them—I suppose their spies learned most of our soldiers are up by the Río Gran, chasing a rebel force—they sailed southwesterly, above our land—" She shivered.

The young Dónoju spat: "They are heathen dogs! They know nothing but to rob and burn and kill!" He sagged. "What have we done that they are loosed on us?"

Ruori rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "They can't be quite such savages," he murmured. "Those blimps are better than anything my own Federation has tried to make. The fabric . . . some tricky synthetic? It must be, or it wouldn't contain hydrogen any length of time. Surely they don't use helium! But for hydrogen production on that scale, you need industry. A good empirical chemistry, at least. They might even electrolyze it . . . good Lesu!"

He realized he had been talking to himself in his home language. "I beg your pardon," he said. "I was wondering what we might do. This ship carries no flying vessels."

Again he looked upward. Atel handed him his binoculars. He focused on the nearest blimp. The huge gas bag and the gondola beneath—itsself as big as many a Maurai ship—formed an aero-

dynamically clean unit. The gondola seemed to be light, woven cane about a wooden frame, but strong. Three-fourths of the way up from its keep a sort of gallery ran clear around, on which the crew might walk and work. At intervals along its rail stood muscle-powered machines. Some must be for hauling, but others suggested catapults. So the blimps of various chiefs fought each other occasionally, in the northern kingdoms. That might be worth knowing. The Federation's political psychologists were skilled at the divide-and-rule game. But for now . . .

The motive power was extraordinarily interesting. Near the gondola bows two lateral spars reached out for some fifty feet, one above the other. They supported two pivoted frames on either side, to which square sails were bent. A similar pair of spars pierced the after hull: eight sails in all. Shark-fin control surfaces were braced to the gas bag. A couple of small retractible windwheels, vaned and pivoted, jutted beneath the gondola, evidently serving the purpose of a false keel. Sails and rudders were trimmed by lines running through block and tackle to windlasses on the gallery. By altering their set, it should be possible to steer at least several points to windward. And, yes, the air moves in different directions at different levels. A blimp could descend by pumping out enough cells in its gas bag, compressing the hydrogen into storage tanks; it could rise by reinflating or by dropping ballast. (Though the latter trick would be reserved for home stretches, when leakage had depleted the gas supply.) Between sails, rudders, and its ability to find a reasonably favoring wind, such a blimp could go roving across several thousand miles, with a payload of no few tons. Oh, a lovely craft!

Ruori lowered his glasses. "Hasn't the Perio built any air vessels, to fight back?" he asked.

"No," mumbled one of the Meycans. "All we ever had was balloons. We don't know how to make a fabric which will hold the lifting-gas long enough, or how to control the flight, so—" His voice trailed off.

"And being a non-scientific culture, you never thought of doing systematic research to learn those tricks," said Ruori.

Tresa, who had been staring at her city, whirled about upon him. "It's easy enough for you!" she screamed. "You haven't stood off Mong in the north and Raucanians in the south for century after century . . . you haven't had to spend twenty years and ten thousand lives making canals and aqueducts, so a few less people would starve . . . you aren't burdened with a peon majority who can only work, who cannot look after themselves because they have never been taught how because their existence is too much of a burden for our land to afford it . . . it's easy enough for you to float about with your shirtless doxies and poke fun at us! What would you have done, S'ñor almighty captain?"

"Be still," reproved young Dónoju. "He saved our lives."

"So far!" she said, through teeth and tears. One small dancing shoe stamped the deck.

For a bemused moment, irrelevantly, Ruori wondered what a doxie was. It sounded uncomplimentary. Could she mean the wahines? But was there a more honorable way for a woman to earn a good dowry than by hazarding her life, side by side with the men of her people on a mission of discovery and civilization? What did Tresa expect to tell her grandchildren about on rainy nights?

Then he wondered further why she should disturb him so. He had noticed it before, in some of the Meycans, an almost terrifying intensity between man and wife, as if a spouse was somehow more than a respected friend and partner. But what other relationship was possible? A psychological specialist might know; Ruori was lost.

He shook an angry head, to clear it, and said aloud: "This is no time for inurbanity." He had to use a Spañol word with not quite the same connotation. "We must decide. Are you certain there is no hope of repelling the pirates?"

"Not unless S' Antón himself passes a miracle," said Dónoju in a dead voice.

Then, snapping erect: "There is only one thing you can do for us, S'ñor. If you will leave now, with the women— There are high born ladies among them, who must not be sold into captivity and

disgrace. Bear them south to Port Wanawato, where the calde will look after their welfare."

"I do not like to run off," said Ruori, looking at the men fallen on the wharf.

"S'ñor, these are *ladies*! In el Dío's name, have mercy on them!"

Ruori studied the taut, bearded faces. He did owe them a great deal of hospitality, and he could see no other way he might ever repay it. "If you wish," he said slowly. "What of yourselves?"

The young noble bowed as if to a king. "Our thanks and prayers will go with you, my lord captain. We men, of course, will now return to the battle." He stood up and barked in a parade-ground voice: "Atten-tion! Form ranks!"

A few swift kisses passed on the main deck, and then the men of Meyco had crossed the gangplank and tramped into their city.

Ruori beat the taffrail with a clenched fist. "If there was some way," he mumbled. "If I could do something!" Almost hopefully: "Do you think the bandits might attack us?"

"Only if you remain here," said Tresa. Her eyes were chips of green ice. "Would to Marí you had not pledged yourself to sail!"

"If they come after us at sea—"

"I do not think they will. You carry a hundred women and a few trade goods. The Sky People will have their pick of ten thousand women, as many men, and all our city's treasures. Why should they take the trouble to pursue you?"

"Aye . . . aye. . . ."

"Go," she said coldly. "You dare not linger."

He faced her. It had been like a blow. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you think the Maurai are cowards?"

She hesitated. Then, with a stubborn, reluctant honesty: "No."

"So why do you scoff me?"

"Oh, go away!" She knelt by the rail, bowed head in arms and surrendered to herself.

Ruori left her and gave his orders. Men scrambled into the rigging. Furled canvas broke loose and cracked in a young wind. Beyond the jetty, the ocean glittered blue, with small whitecaps;

gulls skimmed across heaven. Ruori saw only the glimpses he had had before, as he led the retreat from the palace.

A weaponless man, lying with his head split open. A girl, hardly twelve years old, who screamed as two raiders carried her into an alley. An aged man fleeing in terror, zigzagging, while four archers took potshots at him and howled laughter when he fell transfixed and dragged himself along on his hands. A woman sitting dumb in the street, her dress torn, next to a baby whose brains had been dashed out. A little statue in a niche, a holy image, with a faded bunch of violets at its feet, beheaded by a casual war-hammer. A house that burned, and shrieks from within.

Suddenly the aircraft overhead were not beautiful.

To reach up and pull them out of the sky!

Ruori stopped dead. The crew surged around him. He heard a short-haul chantey, deep young voices with the merriment of always having been free and well fed, but it echoed in a far corner of his brain.

"Casting off!" sang the mate.

"Not yet! Not yet! Wait!"

Ruori ran toward the poop, up the ladder and past the steersman to Doñita Tresa. She had risen again, to stand with bent head past which the hair swept to hide her face.

"Tresa," panted Ruori. "Tresa, I've an idea. I think—there may be a chance—perhaps we can fight back after all!"

She looked up. Her fingers closed on his arm till he felt the nails draw blood.

Words tumbled from him: "It will depend . . . on luring them . . . to us. At least a couple of their vessels . . . must follow us . . . to sea. I think then—I'm not sure of the details, but it may be . . . we can fight . . . even drive them off—"

Still she stared at him. He felt a hesitation. "Of course," he said, "we may lose the fight. And we do have the women aboard."

"If you lose," she asked, so low he could scarcely hear it, "will we die or be captured?"

"I think we will die."

"That is well." She nodded, shivering. "Yes. Fight, then."

"There is one thing I am unsure of. How to make them pursue us." He paused. "If someone were to let himself . . . be captured by them—and told them we were carrying off a great treasure—would they believe that?"

"They might well do so." Life had come back to her voice, even eagerness. "Let us say, the calde's hoard. None ever existed, but the robbers would believe my father's cellars were stuffed with gold."

"Then someone must go to them," said Ruori. He turned his back to her, twisted his fingers together and slogged toward a conclusion he did not want to reach. "But it could not be just anyone. They would club a man in among the other slaves, would they not? I mean, would they listen to him at all?"

"Probably not. Very few of them know Spañol. By the time a man who babbled of treasure was understood, they might all be halfway home." Tresa scowled. "What shall we do?"

Ruori saw the answer, but he could not get it past his throat.

"I am sorry," he mumbled. "My idea was not so good after all. Let us be gone."

The girl forced her way between him and the rail to stand in front of him, touching as if they danced again. Her voice was altogether steady. "You know a way."

"I do not!"

"I have come to know you well, in one night. You are a poor liar. Tell me."

He looked away. Somehow, he got out: "A woman—not any woman, but a very beautiful one—would she not soon be taken to their chief?"

Tresa stood aside. The color drained from her face.

"Yes," she said at last. "I think so."

"But then again," said Ruori wretchedly, "she might be killed. They do so much wanton killing, those men. I cannot let anyone who was given into my protection risk death."

"You heathen fool," she said through tight lips, "do you think the chance of being killed matters to me?"

"What else could happen?" he asked, surprised. And then: "Oh, yes, of course, the woman would be a slave if we lost the battle

afterward. Though I should imagine, if she is beautiful, she would not be badly treated."

"And is that all you—" Tresa stopped. He had never known it was possible for a smile to show pure hurt. "Of course. I should have realized. Your people have other ways of thinking."

"What do you mean?" he fumbled.

A moment more she stood with clenched fists. Then, half to herself: "They killed my father, yes, I saw him dead in the doorway. They would leave my city a ruin peopled by corpses."

Her head lifted. "I shall go," she said.

"You?" He grabbed her shoulders. "No, surely not you! One of the others—"

"Should I send anyone else? I am the calde's daughter."

She pulled herself free of him and hurried across the deck, down the ladder toward the gangway. Her face was turned from the ship. A few words drifted back: "Afterward, if there is an afterward, there is always the convent."

He did not understand. He stood on the poop, staring after her and abominating himself until she was lost to sight. Then he said, "Cast off," and the ship stood out to sea.

v

The Meycans fought doggedly, street by street and house by house, but after a couple of hours their surviving soldiers had all been driven into the northeast corner of S' Antón. They themselves hardly knew that, but a Sky chief had a view from above: one rover was now tethered to the cathedral, with a rope ladder for men to go up and down, and the other vessel, skeleton-crewed, brought their news to it.

"Good enough," said Loklann. "We'll keep them boxed in with a quarter of our force. I don't think they'll sally! Meanwhile the rest of us can get things organized; let's not give these creatures too much time to hide themselves and their silver. In the afternoon, when we're rested, we can land parachuters behind the city troops, drive them out into our lines and destroy them."

He ordered the *Buffalo* grounded, that he might load the most precious loot at once. The men, by and large, were too rough, good lads, but apt to damage a robe or a cup or a jeweled cross in their haste; and sometimes those Meycan things were too beautiful even to give away, let alone sell.

The flagship descended as much as possible. It still hung at a thousand feet, for hand pumps and aluminum-alloy tanks did not allow much hydrogen compression. In colder, denser air it would have been suspended even higher. But ropes snaked from it to a quickly assembled ground crew. At home there were ratcheted capstans outside every lodge, so that as little as four women could bring down a rover. One hated the emergency procedure of bleeding gas, for the Keepers could barely meet demand, in spite of a new sunpower unit added to their hydroelectric station, and charged accordingly. (Or so the Keepers said, but perhaps they were only taking advantage of being inviolable, beyond all kings, to jack up prices. Some chiefs, including Loklann, had begun to experiment with hydrogen production for themselves, but it was a slow thing to puzzle out an art that even the Keepers only half understood.)

Here, enough strong men replaced machinery. The *Buffalo* was soon pegged down in the cathedral plaza, which it almost filled. Loklann inspected each rope himself. His wounded leg ached, but not too much to walk on. More annoying was his right arm, which hurt worse from stitches than from the original cut. The medic had warned him to go easy with it. That meant fighting left-handed, for it should never be told that Loklann sunna Holber stayed out of combat. But he would only be half himself.

He touched the knife which had spiked him. At least he'd gotten a fine steel blade for his pains. And . . . hadn't the owner said they would meet again, to settle who kept it? There were omens in such words. It could be a pleasure to reincarnate that Ruori.

"Skipper. Skipper, sir."

Loklann glanced about. Yuw Red-Ax and Aalan sunna Rickar, men of his own lodge, had hailed him. They grasped the arms of a young woman in black velvet and silver. The beweaponed crowd,

moiling about, was focusing itself on her; raw whoops lifted over the babble.

"What is it?" said Loklann brusquely. He had much to do.

"This wench, sir. A looker, isn't she? We picked her up down near the waterfront."

"Well, shove her into the temple with the rest till— Oh." Loklann rocked back on his heels, narrowing his eyes to meet a steady green glare. She was certainly a looker.

"She kept hollering the same words over and over. *Shef, rey, ombro gran*— I finally wondered if it didn't mean 'chief,'" said Yuw, "and then when she yelled *khan* I was pretty sure she wanted to see you. So we didn't use her at all ourselves," he finished virtuously.

"*Aba tu Español?*" said the girl.

Loklann grinned. "Yes," he replied in the same language, his words heavily accented but sufficient. "Well enough to know you are calling me 'thou.'" Her pleasantly formed mouth drew into a thin line. "Which means you think I am your inferior—or your god, or your beloved."

She flushed, threw back her head (sunlight ran along crow's-wing hair) and answered: "You might tell these oafs to release me."

Loklann said the order in Angliz. Yuw and Aalan let go. The marks of their fingers were bruised into her arms. Loklann stroked his beard. "Did you want to see me?" he asked.

"If you are the leader, yes," she said. "I am the calde's daughter, Doñita Tresa Carabán." Briefly, her voice wavered. "That is my father's chain of office you are wearing. I came on behalf of his people, to ask for terms."

"What?" Loklann blinked. Someone in the warrior crowd laughed.

It must not be in her to beg mercy, he thought; her tone remained brittle: "Considering your sure losses if you fight to a finish, and the chance of provoking a counterattack on your homeland, will you not accept a money ransom and a safe-conduct, releasing your captives and ceasing your destruction?"

"By Oktai," murmured Loklann. "Only a woman could imagine we—" He stopped. "Did you say you came back?"

She nodded. "On the people's behalf. I know I have no legal authority to make terms, but in practice—"

"Forget that!" he rapped. "Where did you come back from?"

She faltered. "That has nothing to do with—"

There were too many eyes around. Loklann bawled orders to start systematic plundering. Then he turned to the girl. "Come aboard the airship with me," he said. "I want to discuss this further."

Her eyes closed, for just a moment, and her lips moved. Then she looked at him, he thought of a cougar he had once trapped, and said in a flat voice: "Yes. I do have other arguments."

"Any woman does," he laughed, "but you more than most!"

"Not that!" she flared. "I meant— No. Marí, pray for me." As he pushed a way through his men, she followed him.

They went past furled sails, to a ladder let down from the gallery. A hatch stood open to the lower hull, showing storage space and leather fetters for slaves. A few guards were posted on the gallery deck. They leaned on their weapons, sweating from beneath helmets, swapping jokes; when Loklann led the girl by, they yelled good-humored envy.

He opened a door. "Have you ever seen one of our vessels?" he asked. The upper gondola contained a long room, bare except for bunk frames on which sleeping bags were laid. Then a series of partitions defined cabinets, a sort of galley, and at last, in the very bow, a room with maps, tables, navigation instruments, speaking tubes. Its walls slanted so far outward that the glazed windows would give a spacious view when the ship was aloft. On a shelf, beneath racked weapons, sat a small idol, tusked and four-armed. A pallet was rolled on the floor.

"The bridge," said Loklann. "Also the captain's cabin." He gestured at one of four wicker chairs, lashed into place. "Be seated, Doñita. Would you like something to drink?"

She sat down but did not reply. Her fists were clenched on her lap. Loklann poured himself a glass of whiskey and tossed off

half at a gulp. "Ahhh! Later we will get some of your own wine for you. It is a shame you have no art of distilling here."

Desperate eyes lifted to him, where he stood over her. "S'ñor," she said, "I beg of you, in Carito's name—well, in your mother's then—spare my people."

"My mother would laugh herself ill to hear that," he said. Then, leaning forward: "See here, let us not spill words. You were escaping, but you came back. Where were you escaping to?"

"I— Does that matter?"

Good, he thought, she was starting to crack. He hammered: "It does. I know you were at the palace this dawn. I know you fled with the dark foreigners. I know their ship departed an hour ago. You must have been on it, but left again. Not so?"

"Yes." She began to tremble.

He sipped molten fire and asked reasonably: "Now tell me, Doñita, what you have to bargain with? You cannot have expected we would give up the best part of our booty and a great many valuable slaves, for a mere safe-conduct. All the Sky kingdoms would disown us. Come now, you must have more to offer, if you hope to buy us off."

"No . . . not really—"

His hand exploded against her cheek, so her head jerked from the blow. She huddled back, touching the red mark, as he growled: "I have no time for games. Tell me! Tell me this instant, what thought drove you back here from safety, or down in the hold you go. You'd fetch a good price when the traders next visit Canyon. There are many homes waiting for you: a woods runner's cabin in Oregon, a Mong khan's yurt in Tekkas, a brothel as far east as Chai Ka-Go. Tell me now, truly, what you know, and you will be spared that much."

She looked downward and said raggedly: "The foreign ship is loaded with the calde's gold. My father had long wanted to remove his personal treasure to a safer place than this, but dared not risk a wagon train across country. There are still many outlaws between here and Fortlez d' S' Ernán; so much loot would tempt the military escort itself to turn bandit. Captain Lohannaso agreed

to carry the gold by sea to Port Wanawato, which is near Fortlez. He could be trusted because his government is anxious for trade with us, he came here officially. The treasure had already been loaded. Of course, when your raid came, the ship also took those women who had been at the palace. But can you not spare them? There is more loot in the foreign ship than your whole fleet can lift."

"By Oktail" whispered Loklann.

He turned from her, paced up and down, finally stopped and stared out the window. He could almost hear the gears turn in his head. It made sense! The palace had been disappointing . . . oh, yes, a lot of damask and silverware and whatnot, but nothing like the cathedral. Either the calde was less rich than powerful, or he concealed his hoard. Loklann had planned to torture a few servants and find out which. Now he realized there was a third possibility.

Better interrogate some prisoners anyway, to make sure— No, there wasn't time. Given a favoring wind, that ship could outrun any rover without working up a sweat. It might already be too late to overhaul. But if not— Hm. Assault would be no cinch. That lean, pitching hull was a small target for paratroops, and with so much rigging in the way. . . . No, wait, bold men could always find a road. How about grappling to the upper works? If the strain tore the rigging loose, so much the better: a weighted rope would then give a clear slideway to the deck. If the hooks held, though, a storming party could nevertheless go along the lines, into the topmasts. Doubtless the sailors were agile too, but had they ever reefed a rover sail in a Merikan thunderstorm, a mile above the earth?

He could improvise as the battle developed. At the very least, it would be fun to try! And at most, he might be reborn a world conqueror, for such an exploit in this life.

He laughed aloud, joyously. "We'll do it!"

Tresa rose. "You will spare the city?" she whispered hoarsely.

"I never promised any such thing," said Loklann blandly. "Of course, the ship's cargo will crowd out some of the stuff and peo-

ple we might take otherwise. Unless, hm, unless we decide to sail the ship up to Californi, loaded, and meet it there with more rovers. Yes, why not?"

"You oathbreaker," she said, with a hellful of scorn.

"I only promised not to sell you," said Loklann. His gaze went up and down her. "And I won't."

He took a stride forward and gathered her to him. She fought, cursing; once she managed to draw Ruori's knife from his belt, but his cuirass stopped the blade.

Finally he rose. She wept at his feet, her breast marked red by her father's chain. He said more quietly, "No, I will not sell you, Tresa. I will keep you."

VI

"Blimp ho-o-o-!"

The lookout's cry hung lonesome for a minute between wind and broad waters. Down under the mainmast, it seethed with crewmen running to their posts.

Ruori squinted eastward. The land was a streak under cumulus clouds mountainous and blue-shadowed. It took him a while to find the enemy, in all that sky. At last the sun struck them. He lifted his binoculars. Two painted killer whales lazed his way, slanting down from a mile altitude.

He sighed. "Only two," he said.

"That may be more than enough for us," said Atel Hamid. Sweat studded his forehead.

Ruori gave his mate a sharp look. "You're not afraid of them, are you? I daresay that's been one of their biggest assets, superstition."

"Oh, no, captain. I know the principle of buoyancy as well as you do. But those people up there are tough. And they're not trying to storm us from a dock this time; they're in their element."

"So are we." Ruori clapped the other man's back. "Take over. Tanaroa knows just what's going to happen, but use your own judgment if I'm spitted."

"I wish you'd let me go," protested Atel. "I don't like being safe down here. It's what can happen aloft that worries me."

"You won't be too safe for your own liking." Ruori forced a grin. "And somebody has to steer this tub home to hand in all those lovely reports to the Geoethnic Research Endeavor."

He swung down the ladder to the main deck and hurried to the mainmast shrouds. His crew yelled around him, weapons gleamed. The two big box kites quivered taut canvas, lashed to a bollard and waiting. Ruori wished there had been time to make more.

Even as it was, though, he had delayed longer than seemed wise, first heading far out to sea and then tacking slowly back, to make the enemy search for him while he prepared. (Or planned, for that matter. When he dismissed Tresa, his own ideas had been little more than a conviction that he could fight.) Assuming they were lured after him at all, he had risked their losing patience and going back to the land. For an hour, now, he had dawdled under mainsail, genoa, and a couple of flying jibs, hoping the Sky People were lubbers enough not to find that suspiciously little canvas for such good weather.

But here they were, and there was an end to worry and remorse on a certain girl's behalf. Such emotions were rare in an Islander; and to find himself focusing them thus on a single person, out of all earth's millions, had been horrible. Ruori swarmed up the ratlines, as if he fled something.

The blimps were still high, passing overhead on an upper-level breeze. Down here was almost a straight south wind. The aircraft, unable to steer really close-hauled, would descend when they were sea-level upwind of him. Even so, estimated a cold part of Ruori's brain, the *Dolphin* could avoid their clumsy rush.

But the *Dolphin* wasn't going to.

The rigging was now dotted with armed sailors. Ruori pulled himself up on the mainmast crosstrees and sat down, casually swinging his legs. The ship heeled over in a flaw and he hung above greenish-blue, white-streaked immensity. He balanced, scarcely noticing, and asked Hiti: "Are you all set?"

"Aye." The big harpooner, his body one writhe of tattoos and

muscles, nodded a shaven head. Lashed to the fid where he squatted was the ship's catapult, cocked and loaded with one of the huge irons that could kill a sperm whale at one blow. A couple more lay alongside in their rack. Hiti's two mates and four deckhands poised behind him, holding the smaller harpoons—mere six-foot shafts—that were launched from a boat by hand. The lines of all trailed down the mast to the bows.

"Aye, let 'em come now." Hiti grinned all over his round face. "Nan eat the world, but this'll be something to make a dance about when we come home!"

"If we do," said Ruori. He touched the small boat ax thrust into his loincloth. Like a curtain, the blinding day seemed to veil a picture from home, where combers broke white under the moon, longfires flared on a beach and dancers were merry and palm trees cast shadows for couples who stole away. He wondered how a Meycan calde's daughter might like it . . . if her throat had not been cut.

"There's a sadness on you, captain," said Hiti.

"Men are going to die," said Ruori.

"What of it?" Small kindly eyes studied him. "They'll die willing, if they must, for the sake of the song there'll be made. You've another trouble than mere death."

"Let me be!"

The harpooner looked hurt, but withdrew into silence. Wind streamed and the ocean glittered.

The aircraft steered close. There would be one on each side. Ruori unslung the megaphone at his shoulder. Atel Hamid held the *Dolphin* steady on a broad reach.

Now Ruori could see a grinning god at the prow of the starboard airship. It would pass just over the topmasts, a little to windward of the rail. . . . Arrows went impulsively toward it from the yardarms, without effect, but no one was excited enough to waste a rifle cartridge. Hiti swiveled his catapult. "Wait," said Ruori. "We'd better see what they do."

Helmeted heads appeared over the blimp's gallery rail. A man stepped up—another, another, at intervals—they whirled triple-

clawed iron grapnels and let go. Ruori saw one strike the foremast, rebound, hit a jib . . . the line to the blimp tautened and sang but did not break, it was of leather . . . the jib ripped, canvas thundered, struck a sailor in the belly and knocked him from his yard . . . the man recovered enough to straighten out and hit the water in a clean dive, Lesu grant he lived . . . the grapnel bumped along, caught the gaff of the fore-and-aft mainsail, wood groaned . . . the ship trembled as line after line snapped tight.

She leaned far over, dragged by leverage. Her sails banged. No danger of capsizing—yet—but a mast could be pulled loose. And now, up over the gallery rail and seizing a rope between hands and knees, the pirates came. Whooping like boys, they slid down to the grapnels and clutched after any rigging that came to hand.

One of them sprang monkey-like onto the mainmast gaff, below the cross trees. A harpooner's mate cursed, hurled his weapon, and skewered the invader. "Belay that!" roared Hiti. "We need those irons!"

Ruori scanned the situation. The leeward blimp was still maneuvering in around its mate, which was being blown to port. He put the megaphone to his mouth and a solar-battery amplifier cried for him: "Hear this! Hear this! Burn that second enemy now, before he grapples! Cut the lines to the first one and repel all boarders!"

"Shall I fire?" called Hiti. "I'll never have a better target."

"Aye."

The harpooner triggered his catapult. It unwound with a thunder noise. Barbed steel smote the engaged gondola low in a side, tore through, and ended on the other side of interior planking.

"Wind 'er up!" bawled Hiti. His own gorilla hands were already on a crank lever. Somehow two other men found space to help him.

Ruori slipped down the futtock shrouds and jumped to the gaff. Another pirate had landed there and a third was just arriving, with two more aslide behind him. The man on the spar balanced barefooted, as good as any sailor, and drew a sword. Ruori dropped as the blade whistled, caught a mainsail grommet one-handed, and

hung there, striking with his boat ax at the grapnel line. The pirate crouched and stabbed at him. Ruori thought of Tresa, smashed his hatchet into the man's face, and flipped him off, down to the deck. He cut again. The leather was tough, but his blade was keen. The line parted and whipped away. The gaff swung free, almost yanking Ruori's fingers loose. The second Sky Man toppled, hit a cabin below and spattered. The men on the line slid to its end. One of them could not stop, the sea took him. The other was smashed against the masthead as he pendulumed.

Ruori pulled himself back astride the gaff and sat there a while, heaving air into lungs that burned. The fight ramped around him, on shrouds and spars and down on the decks. The other blimp edged closer.

Astern, raised by the speed of a ship moving into the wind, a box kite lifted. Atel sang a command and the helmsman put the rudder over. Even with the drag on her, the *Dolphin* responded well; a profound science of fluid mechanics had gone into her design. Being soaked in whale oil, it clung there for a time—long enough for "messengers" of burning paper to whirl up its string. The kite burst into flame.

The blimp sheered off, the kite fell away, its small gunpowder load blew up harmlessly. Atel cursed and gave further orders. The *Dolphin* tacked. The second kite, already aloft and afire, hit target. It detonated.

Hydrogen gushed out. There was no explosion, but sudden flames wreathed the blimp. They seemed pale in the sun-dazzle. Smoke began to rise, as the plastic between gas cells disintegrated. The aircraft descended like a slow meteorite to the water.

Its companion vessel had no reasonable choice but to cast loose all unsevered grapnels, abandoning the still outnumbered boarding party. The captain could not know that the *Dolphin* had only possessed two kites. A few vengeful catapult bolts spat from it. Then it was free, rapidly falling astern. The Maurai ship rocked toward an even keel.

The enemy might retreat or he might plan some fresh attack. Ruori did not intend that it should be either. He megaphoned:

"Put about! Face that scum-gut!" And led a rush down the shrouds to a deck where combat still went on.

For Hiti's gang had put three primary harpoons and half a dozen lesser ones into the gondola.

Their lines trailed in tightening catenaris from the blimp to the capstan in the bows. No fear now of undue strain. The *Dolphin*, like any Maurai craft, was meant to live off the sea as she traveled. She had dragged more than one right whale alongside; a blimp was nothing in comparison. What counted was speed, before the pirates realized what was happening and found ways to cut loose.

"*Tohiha, hioha, itoki, itoki!*" The old canoe chant rang forth as men tramped about the capstan. Ruori hit the deck, saw a Canyon man fighting a sailor, sword against club, and brained the fellow from behind as he would any other vermin. (Then wondered, dimly shocked, what made him think thus about a human being.) The battle was rapidly concluded, the Sky Men faced hopeless odds. But half a dozen Federation people were badly hurt. Ruori had the few surviving pirates tossed into a lazaret, his own casualties taken below to anesthetics and antibiotics and cooing *Doñitas*. Then, quickly, he prepared his crew for the next phase.

The blimp had been drawn almost to the bowsprit. It was canted over so far that its catapults were useless. Pirates lined the gallery deck, howled and shook their weapons. They outnumbered the *Dolphin* crew by a factor of three or four. Ruori recognized one among them—the tall yellow-haired man who had fought him outside the palace—it was a somehow eerie feeling.

"Shall we burn them?" asked Atel.

Ruori grimaced. "I suppose we have to," he said. "Try not to ignite the vessel itself. You know we want it."

A walking beam moved up and down, driven by husky Islanders. Flame spurted from a ceramic nozzle. The smoke and stench and screams that followed, and the things to be seen when Ruori ordered cease fire, made even the hardest veteran of corsair patrol look a bit ill. The Maurai were an unsentimental folk, but they did not like to inflict pain.

"Hose," rasped Ruori. The streams of water that followed were like some kind of blessing. Wicker that had begun to burn hissed into charred quiescence.

The ship's own grapnels were flung. A couple of cabin boys darted past grown men to be first along the lines. They met no resistance on the gallery. The uninjured majority of pirates stood in a numb fashion, their armament at their feet, the fight kicked out of them. Jacob's ladders followed the boys; the *Dolphin* crew swarmed aboard the blimp and started rounding up prisoners.

A few Sky Men lurched from behind a door, weapons aloft. Ruori saw the tall fair man among them. The man drew Ruori's dagger, left-handed, and ran toward him. His right arm seemed nearly useless. "A Canyon, a Canyon!" he called, the ghost of a war cry.

Ruori sidestepped the charge and put out a foot. The blond man tripped. As he fell, the hammer of Ruori's ax clopped down, catching him on the neck. He crashed, tried to rise, shuddered, and lay twitching.

"I want my knife back." Ruori squatted, undid the pirate's tooled leather belt, and began to hogtie him.

Dazed blue eyes looked up with a sort of pleading. "Are you not going to kill me?" mumbled the other in *Spañol*.

"Haristi, no," said Ruori, surprised. "Why should I?"

He sprang up. The last resistance had ended, the blimp was his. He opened the forward door, thinking the equivalent of a ship's bridge must lie beyond it.

Then for a while he did not move at all, nor did he hear anything but the wind and his own blood.

It was Tresa who finally came to him. Her hands were held out before her, like a blind person's, and her eyes looked through him. "You are here," she said, flat and empty.

"Doñita," stammered Ruori. He caught her hands. "Doñita, had I known you were aboard, I would never have . . . have risked—"

"Why did you not burn and sink us, like that other vessel?"

she asked in a flayed voice. "Why must this one return to the city?"

She wrenched free of him and stumbled out on to the deck. It was steeply tilted, and it bucked beneath her. She fell, picked herself up, walked with barefoot care to the rail and stared out across the ocean. Her hair and torn dress fluttered in the wind.

VII

There was a great deal of technique to handling an airship. Ruori could feel that the thirty men he had put aboard this one were sailing it as awkwardly as possible. An experienced Sky Man would know what sort of thermals and downdrafts to expect, just from a glance at land or water below; he could estimate the level at which a desired breeze was blowing, and rise or fall smoothly; he could even beat to windward, though it would be a slow process much plagued by drift.

Nevertheless, an hour's study showed the basic principles. Ruori went back to the bridge and gave orders in the speaking tube. Presently the land came nearer. A glance below showed the *Dolphin*, with a cargo of war captives, following on shortened sail. He and his fellow aeronauts would have to take a lot of banter about their celestial snail's pace. Ruori did not smile at the thought or plan his replies, as he would have done even yesterday. Tresa sat so still behind him.

"Do you know the name of this craft, Doñita?" he asked, to break the silence.

"He called it *Buffalo*," she said, remote and uninterested.

"What's that?"

"A sort of wild cattle."

"I gather, then, that he talked to you while cruising in search of me. Did he say anything else of interest?"

"He spoke of his people. He boasted of all the things they have which we don't . . . engines, powers, alloys . . . as if that made them any less a pack of filthy savages."

At least she was showing some spirit. He had been afraid she

had started willing her heart to stop; but he remembered he had seen no evidence of that common Maurai practice here in Meyco.

"Did he abuse you so badly, then?" he asked, not looking at her.

"You would not consider it abuse," she said violently. "Now leave me alone, for mercy's sake!" He heard her go from him, through the door to the after sections.

Well, he thought, after all, her father was killed. That would grieve anyone, anywhere in the world, but her perhaps more than him. For a Meycan child was raised solely by its parents; it did not spend half its time eating or sleeping or playing with any casual relative, like most Island young. So the immediate kin would have more psychological significance here. At least, it was the only explanation Ruori could think of for the sudden darkness within Tresa.

The city hove into view. He saw the remaining enemy vessels gleam above it. Three against one . . . yes, this would become a legend among the Sea People, if it succeeded. Ruori knew he should have felt the same reckless pleasure as a man did surf-bathing, or shark fighting, or sailing in a typhoon, any breakneck sport where success meant glory and girls. He could hear his men chant outside, beat war-drum rhythms out with hands and stamping feet. But his own heart was Antarctic.

The nearest hostile craft approached. Ruori tried to meet it in a professional way. He had attired his prize crew in captured Sky outfits. A superficial glance would take them for legitimate Canyonites, depleted after a hard fight but with the captured Maurai ship at their heels.

As the northerners steered close in the leisurely airship fashion, Ruori picked up his speaking tube. "Steady as she goes. Fire when we pass abeam."

"Aye, aye," said Hiti.

A minute later the captain heard the harpoon catapult rumble. Through a port he saw the missile strike the other gondola amidships. "Pay out line," he said. "We want to hold her for the kite, but not get burned ourselves."

"Aye, I've played swordfish before now." Laughter bubbled in Hiti's tones.

The foe sheered, frantic. A few bolts leaped from its catapults; one struck home, but a single punctured gas cell made small difference. "Put about!" cried Ruori. No sense in presenting his beam to a broadside. Both craft began to drift downwind, sails flapping. "Hard a-lee!" The *Buffalo* became a drogue, holding its victim to a crawl. And here came the kite prepared on the way back. This time it included fish hooks. It caught and held fairly on the Canyonite bag. "Cast off!" yelled Ruori. Fire whirled up the kite string. In minutes it had enveloped the enemy. A few parachutes were blown out to sea.

"Two to go," said Ruori, without any of his men's shouted triumph.

The invaders were no fools. Their other blimps turned back over the city, not wishing to expose themselves to more flame from the water. One descended, threw out hawsers, and was rapidly hauled to the plaza. Through his binoculars, Ruori saw armed men swarm aboard it. The other, doubtless with a mere patrol crew, maneuvered toward the approaching *Buffalo*.

"I think that fellow wants to engage us," warned Hiti. "Meanwhile Number Two down there will take on a couple of hundred soldiers, then lay alongside us and board."

"I know," said Ruori. "Let's oblige them."

He steered as if to close with the sparsely manned patroller. It did not avoid him, as he had feared it might; but then, there was a compulsive bravery in the Sky culture. Instead, it maneuvered to grapple as quickly as possible. That would give its companion a chance to load warriors and rise— It came very near.

Now to throw a scare in them, Ruori decided. "Fire arrows," he said. Out on deck, hardwood pistons were shoved into little cylinders, igniting tinder at the bottom; thus oil-soaked shafts were kindled. As the enemy came in range, red comets began to streak from the *Buffalo* archers.

Had his scheme not worked, Ruori would have turned off. He

didn't want to sacrifice more men in hand-to-hand fighting; instead, he would have tried seriously to burn the other airship from afar, though his strategy needed it. But the morale effect of the previous disaster was very much present. As blazing arrows thunked into their gondola, a battle tactic so two-edged that no northern crew was even equipped for it, the Canyonites panicked and went over the side. Perhaps, as they parachuted down, a few noticed that no shafts had been aimed at their gas bag.

"Grab fast!" sang Ruori. "Douse any fires!"

Grapnels thumped home. The blimps rocked to a relative halt. Men leaped to the other gallery; bucketsful of water splashed.

"Stand by," said Ruori. "Half our boys on the prize. Break out the lifelines and make them fast."

He put down the tube. A door squeaked behind him. He turned, as Tresa re-entered the bridge. She was still pale, but she had somehow combed her hair, and her head was high.

"Another!" she said with a note near joy. "Only one of them left!"

"But it will be full of their men." Ruori scowled. "I wish now I had not accepted your refusal to go aboard the *Dolphin*. I wasn't thinking clearly. This is too hazardous."

"Do you think I care for that?" she said. "I am a Carabán."

"But I care," he said.

The haughtiness dropped from her; she touched his hand, fleetingly, and color rose in her cheeks. "Forgive me. You have done so much for us. There is no way we can ever thank you."

"Yes, there is," said Ruori.

"Name it."

"Do not stop your heart just because it has been wounded." She looked at him with a kind of sunrise in her eyes.

His boatswain appeared at the outer door. "All set, captain. We're holding steady at a thousand feet, with a man standing by every valve these two crates have got."

"Each has been assigned a particular escape line?"

"Aye," The boatswain departed.

"You'll need one too. Come." Ruori took Tresa by the hand and led her onto the gallery. They saw sky around them, a breeze touched their faces and the deck underfoot moved like a live thing. He indicated one of many light cords from the *Dolphin's* store, bowlined to the rail. "We aren't going to risk parachuting with untrained men," he said. "But you've no experience in skinning down one of these. I'll make you a harness which will hold you safely. Ease yourself down hand over hand. When you reach the ground, cut loose." His knife slashed some pieces of rope and he knotted them together with a seaman's skill. When he fitted the harness on her, she grew tense under his fingers.

"But I am your friend," he murmured.

She eased. She even smiled, shakenly. He gave her his knife and went back inboard.

And now the last pirate vessel stood up from the earth. It moved near; Ruori's two craft made no attempt to flee. He saw sunlight flash on edged metal. He knew they had witnessed the end of their companion craft and would not be daunted by the same technique; rather, they would close in, even with their ship burning about them—if nothing else, they could kindle him in turn and then parachute to safety. He did not send arrows.

When only a few fathoms separated him from the enemy, he cried: "Let go the valves!"

Gas whoofed from both bags. The linked blimps dropped.

"Fire!" shouted Ruori. Hiti aimed his catapult up and sent a harpoon with anchor cable through the bottom of the attacker. "Burn and abandon!"

Men on deck touched off oil which other men splashed from jars. Flames sprang up.

With the weight of two nearly deflated vessels dragging it from below, the Canyon ship began to fall. At five hundred feet the tossed lifelines draped across flat rooftops and trailed in the streets. Ruori went over the side. He scorched his palms going down.

He was not much too quick. The harpooned blimp ordered compressed hydrogen released; the vessel rose to a thousand feet

with its burden, seeking sky room. Presumably no one had yet seen that the burden was on fire. In no case would they find it easy to shake or cut loose from one of Hiti's irons.

Ruori stared upward. Fanned by the wind, the flames were smokeless, a small fierce sun. He had not counted on his fire taking the enemy by total surprise. He had assumed they would parachute to earth, where the Meycans could attack. Almost, he wanted to warn them.

Then flame reached the remaining hydrogen in the collapsed gas bags. There was a sort of giant gasp. The topmost vessel became a flying pyre. The wind bore it out over the city walls. A few antlike figures managed to spring free. The parachute of one was burning.

"Sant'sima Marí," whispered a voice, and Tresa crept into Ruori's arms and hid her face.

VIII

After dark, candles were lit throughout the palace. They could not blank the ugliness of stripped walls and smoke-blackened ceilings. The guardsmen who lined the throne room were tattered and weary. Nor did S' Antón itself rejoice, yet. There were too many dead.

Ruori sat throned on the calde's dais, Tresa at his right and Páwolo Dónoju on his left. Until a new set of officials could be chosen, these must take authority. The Don sat rigid, not allowing his bandaged head to droop, but now and then his lids grew too heavy to hold up. Tresa watched enormous-eyed from beneath the hood of a cloak wrapping her. Ruori sprawled at ease; he felt a little more happy now that the fighting was over.

It had been a grim business, even after the heartened city troops had sallied and driven the surviving enemy before them. Too many Sky Men fought till they were killed. The hundreds of prisoners, mostly from the first Maurai success, would prove a dangerous booty; no one was sure what to do with them.

"But at least their host is done for," said Dónoju.

Ruori shook his head. "No, S'ñor. I am sorry, but there is no end in sight. Up north are thousands of such aircraft, and a strong hungry people. They will come again."

"We will meet them, captain. The next time we shall be prepared. A larger garrison, barrage balloons, fire kites, cannons that shoot upward, even a flying navy of our own . . . we can learn what to do."

Tresa stirred. There was life again in her words, but a life which hated: "In the end, we will carry the war to them. There will not be one left in all the Corado highlands."

"No," said Ruori. "That must not be."

Her head jerked about, she stared at him from the shadow of her hood. Finally she said, "True, we are bidden to love our enemies, but you cannot mean the Sky People. They are not human!"

Ruori spoke to a page: "Send for the chief prisoner."

"To hear our judgment on him?" asked Dónoju. "But that should be done formally, in public."

"Only to talk with us," said Ruori.

"I do not understand you," said Tresa. Her tones faltered, unable to carry the intended scorn, but the phrases came out: "After all you have done, suddenly there is no manhood in you."

He wondered why it should hurt for her to say that. He would not have cared if she had been anyone else.

Loklann entered between two guards. His hands were bound behind him and dried blood was on his face, but he walked like a conqueror under the pikes. When he reached the dais, he stood with feet braced apart and grinned up at Tresa.

"Well," he said, "so you find these others less satisfactory and want me back."

She jumped to her feet and screamed: "Kill him!"

"No!" cried Ruori.

The guardsmen hesitated, their machetes half drawn. Ruori stood up and caught the girl's wrists. She struggled, spitting like a cat. "Don't kill him, then," she agreed at last, so thickly it was

hard to understand. "Not now. Make it slow. Strangle him, burn him alive, toss him on your spears—"

Ruori held fast till she stood quietly.

When he let go, she sat down and wept.

Páwolo Dónoju said in a voice like steel: "I believe I understand. A fit punishment must certainly be devised."

Loklann spat on the floor. "Of course," he said. "When you have a man tied up there are any number of dirty little games to play with him."

"Be still," said Ruori. "You are not helping your own cause. Or mine."

He sat down, crossed his legs and laced fingers around one knee and gazed before him, into the darkness at the hall's end. "I know you have all suffered from this man's work," he said, slowly and with care. "You can expect to suffer more from his kinfolk in the future. They are a young race, heedless as children, even as your ancestors and mine were once young. Do you think the Perio was established without hurt and harm? Or, if I remember your history rightly, that the Español people were welcomed here by the Inios? That the Ingliss did not come to N'Zealann with slaughter, and that the Maurai were not once cannibals? In an age of heroes, the hero must have an opponent.

"Your real weapon against the Sky People is not an army, sent up to lose itself in unmapped mountains. . . . Your priests, merchants, artists, craftsmen, manners, fashions, learning—there is the means to bring them to you on their knees, if you will use it!"

Loklann started. "You devil," he whispered. "Do you actually think to convert us to . . . a woman's faith and a city's cage?" He shook back his tawny mane and roared so the walls rang. "No!"

"It will take a century or two," said Ruori.

Don Páwolo smiled in his young scanty beard. "A refined revenge, S'ñor captain," he admitted.

"Too refined!" Tresa lifted her face from her hands, gulped after air, held up claw-crooked fingers and brought them down as if into Loklann's eyes. "Even if it could be done," she snarled, "even if they did have souls, what do we want with them, or their chil-

dren or grandchildren . . . they who murdered our babies today? Before almighty Dío—I am the last Carabán and I will have my following to speak for me in Meyco's government—there will never be anything for them but extermination! We can do it, I swear. There would be Tekkans who would help, for plunder. I shall yet live to see your home burning, you swine, and your sons hunted with dogs!"

She turned frantically toward Ruori. "How else can our land be safe? We are ringed in with enemies. We have no choice but to destroy them, or they will destroy us. And we are the last Merikan civilization!"

She sat back and shuddered. Ruori reached over to take her hand. It felt cold. For a bare instant, unconsciously, she returned the pressure, then jerked away.

He sighed in his weariness.

"I must disagree," he said. "I am sorry. I understand how you feel."

"You do not," she said through clamped jaws. "You cannot."

"But after all," he said, forcing dryness, "I am not just a man with human desires. I represent my government. I must return to tell them what is here, and I can predict their response.

"They will help you stand off attack. That is not an aid you can refuse, is it? The men who will be responsible for all Meyco are not going to decline our offer of alliance merely to preserve a precarious independence of action, whatever a few extremists may argue for. And our terms will be most reasonable. We will want little more from you than a policy working toward conciliation and close relations with the Sky People, as soon as they have tired of battering themselves against our united defense."

"What?" said Loklann. Otherwise it was very still. Eyes gleamed white from the shadows of helmets, toward Ruori.

"We will begin with you," said the Maurai. "At the proper time, you and your fellows will be escorted home. Your ransom will be that your nation allow a diplomatic and trade mission to enter."

"No," said Tresa, as if it hurt her throat. "Not him. Send back

all the others if you must, but not him—to boast of what he did today.”

Loklann grinned again, looking straight at her. “I will,” he said.

Anger flickered in Ruori, but he held his mouth shut.

“I do not understand,” hesitated Don Páwolo. “*Why* do you favor these animals?”

“Because they are more civilized than you,” said Ruori.

“What?” The noble sprang to his feet, snatching for his sword. Then, stiffly, he sat down again. His tone froze over. “Explain yourself, S’ñor.”

Ruori could not see Tresa’s face, in the private night of her hood, but he felt her drawing farther from him than a star. “They have developed aircraft,” he said, slumping back in his chair, worn out and with no sense of victory. O great creating Tanaroa, grant me sleep this night!

“But—”

“It has been done from the ground up,” explained Ruori, “not as a mere copy of ancient techniques. Beginning as refugees, the Sky People created an agriculture which can send warriors by the thousands from what was once desert, yet plainly does not require peon hordes. On interrogation I have learned that they have sunpower and hydroelectric power, a synthetic chemistry of sorts, a well-developed navigation with all the mathematics which that implies, gunpowder, metallurgics, aerodynamics. . . . Oh, I dare say it’s a lopsided culture, a thin layer of learning above a largely illiterate mass. But even the mass must respect technology, or it would never have been supported to get as far as it has.

“In short,” he sighed, wondering if he could make her understand, “the Sky People are a scientific race—the only one besides ourselves which we Maurai have yet discovered. And that makes them too precious to lose.

“You have better manners here, more humane laws, higher art, broader vision, all the traditional virtues. But you are not scientific. You use rote knowledge handed down from the ancients. Because there is no more fossil fuel, you depend on muscle power;

inevitably, then, there is a peon class, and always will be. Because the iron and copper mines are exhausted, you tear down old ruins. In your land I have seen no research on wind power, sun power, the energy reserves of the living cell—not to mention the theoretical possibility of hydrogen fusion without a uranium primer. You irrigate the desert at a thousand times the effort it would take to farm the sea, yet have never even tried to improve your fishing techniques. You have not exploited the aluminum which is still abundant in ordinary clays, not sought to make it into strong alloys; no, your farmers use tools of wood and volcanic glass!

"Oh, you are neither ignorant nor superstitious. What you lack is merely the means of gaining new knowledge. You are a fine people, the world is the sweeter for you, I love you as much as I loathe this devil before us. But ultimately, my friends, if left to yourselves, you will slide gracefully back into the Stone Age."

A measure of strength returned. He raised his voice till it filled the hall: "The way of the Sky People is the rough way outward, to the stars. In that respect—and it overrides all others—they are more akin to us Maurai than you are. We cannot let our kin die."

He sat then, in silence, under Loklann's smirk and Dónoju's stare. A guardsman shifted on his feet, with a faint squeak of leather harness.

Tresa said at last, very low in the shadows: "That is your final word, S'ñor?"

"Yes," said Ruori. He turned to her. As she leaned forward, the hood fell back a little, so that candlelight touched her. And the sight of green eyes and parted lips gave him back his victory.

He smiled. "I do not expect you will understand at once. May I discuss it with you again, often? When you have seen the Islands, as I hope you will—"

"You *foreigner!*" she screamed.

Her hand cracked on his cheek. She rose and ran down the dais steps and out of the hall.

No collection of fantasy and science fiction can be considered properly representative if it fails to include a superior example of the bar-fantasy. . . .

The Causes

by Idris Seabright

"God rot their stinking souls," the man on the bar stool next to George said passionately. "God bury them in the lowest circle of the pit, under the flaying ashes. May their eyeballs drip blood and their bones bend under them. May they thirst and be given molten glass for liquid. May they eat their own flesh and sicken with it. May they—" He seemed to choke over his rage. After a moment he lifted his glass of stout and buried his nose in it.

"You Irish?" George asked with interest.

"Irish? No." The man with the stout seemed surprised. "I'm from New Zealand. Mother was Albanian. I'm a mountain climber. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered. What are you sore about?"

The man with the moustache patted the newspaper in his pocket. "I've been reading about the H-bomb," he said. "It makes me sick. I'm cursing the scientists. Do they want to kill us all? On both sides, I'm cursing them."

"Yes, but you have to be reasonable," the man on the second bar stool beyond George argued, leaning toward the other two. "None of us like that bomb, but we have to have it. The world's a bad place these days, and those Russians—they're bad cookies. Dangerous." Uneasily he shifted the trumpet case he was holding on his lap.

"Oh, sure, they're dangerous." The man with the stout hesitated, sucking on his moustache. "But basically, the Russians have nothing to do with it," he said. He cleared his throat. "I know what you're going to say, but it's not true. Our real trouble isn't

the Russians . . . We're in the mess we're in because we've lost our gods."

"Hunh?" said the man on the second bar stool. "Oh, I get it. You mean we've become anti-religious, materialistic, worldly. Ought to go back to the old-time religion. Is that what you mean?"

"I did not," the man with the stout said irritably. "I meant what I said. The gods—our real gods—are gone. That's why everything is so fouled up these days. There's nobody to take care of us. No gods."

"No gods?" asked the man on the second bar stool.

"No gods."

The interchange began to irk George. He finished his drink—bourbon and soda—and motioned to the bartender for another. When it came, he said to the man with the moustache, "Well, if we haven't got any gods, what's happened to them? Gone away?"

"They're in New Zealand," the man with the moustache said.

He must have sensed the withdrawal of his auditors, for he added hastily, "It's all true dinkum. I'm not making it up. They're living on Ruapehu in Wellington—it's about 9,000 feet—now instead of Olympus in Thrace."

George took a leisurely pull at his drink. He was feeling finely credulous. "Well, go on. How did they get there?" he asked.

"It started when Aphrodite lost her girdle—"

"Venus!" said the man on the second bar stool. He rolled his eyes. "This ought to be hot. How'd she lose it?"

"Her motives were above reproach," the man with the stout said stiffly. "This isn't a smutty story. Aphrodite lent the girdle to a married woman who was getting along badly with her husband for the most usual reason, and the girl was so pleased with the new state of things that she forgot to return it. The couple decided to take a long cruise as a sort of delayed honeymoon, and the woman packed the girdle in her trunk by mistake. When Aphrodite missed it—Olympian society goes all to pieces without the girdle; even the eagles on Father Zeus's throne start fighting and tearing feathers—it was too late. The ship had gone so far she couldn't pick up any emanation from it."

"When did all this happen?" George asked.

"In 1913. You want to remember the date.

"Well, as I was saying, she couldn't pick up any emanation from the girdle. So finally they sent Hermes out to look for it—he's the divine messenger, you know. And he didn't come back."

"Why not?" the man on the second bar stool asked.

"Because, when Hermes located the ship, it had put in at New Zealand. Now, New Zealand's a beautiful country. Like Greece, I guess—I've never been there—but better wooded and more water. Hermes picked up the girdle. But he liked the place so much he decided to stay.

"They got worried then, and they sent others of the Olympians out. Iris was first, and then, the Muses and the Moirae. None of them came back to Olympus. Those left got more and more alarmed, and one big shot after another went out hunting the girdle. Finally by 1914 there wasn't anybody left on Olympus except Ares. He said he didn't much care for the girdle. Things looked interesting where he was. He guessed he'd stay.

"So that's the situation at present. All the gods except Ares, and once in a while Athena, are on Ruapehu. They've been there since 1914. The Maori are a handsome people anyhow, and you ought to see some of the children growing up in the villages around there. Young godlings, that's what they are.

"Athena doesn't like it there as well as the others. She's a maiden goddess, and I suppose there isn't so much to attract her. She keeps going back to Europe and trying to help us. But somehow, everything she does, no matter how well she means it, always turns out to help that hulking big half-brother of hers."

"Interesting symbolism," George said approvingly. "All the gods we've got left are Ares, the brutal war god, and Athena, the divine patroness of science. Athena wants to help us, but whatever she does helps the war god. Neat. Very neat."

The man with the moustache ordered another bottle of stout. When it came, he stared at George stonily. "It is not symbolism," he said, measuring his words. "It's the honest truth. I told you I

was a mountain climber, didn't I? I climbed Ruapehu last summer. I saw them there."

"What did they look like?" George asked lazily.

"Well, I really only saw Hermes. He's the messenger, you know, and it's easier for people to look at him without being blinded. He's a young man, very handsome, very jolly-looking. He looks like he'd play all kinds of tricks on you, but you wouldn't mind it. They'd be good tricks. He—you could see him shining, even in the sun."

"What about the others?"

The man with the stout shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it. You wouldn't understand me. They're too bright. They have to put on other shapes when they go among men.

"But I think they miss us. I think they're lonesome, really. The Maori are a fine people, very intelligent, but they're not quite what the gods are used to. You know what I think?" The man with the moustache lowered his voice solemnly. "I think we ought to send an embassy to them. Send people with petitions and offerings. If we asked them right, asked them often enough, they'd be sorry for us. They'd come back."

There was a stirring four or five stools down, toward the middle of the bar. A sailor stood up and came toward the man with the moustache. "So you don't like the government?" he said menacingly. There was a beer bottle in his hand.

"Government?" the man with the moustache answered. George noticed that he was slightly pop-eyed. "What's that got to do with it? I'm trying to help."

"Haaaaaa! I heard you talking against it," said the sailor. He swayed on his feet for a moment. Then he aimed a heavy blow with the beer bottle at the center of the moustache.

The man with the moustache ducked. He got off the bar stool, still doubled up. He drew back. He rammed the sailor hard in the pit of the stomach with his head.

As the sailor collapsed, the man from New Zealand stepped neatly over him. He walked to the front of the bar and handed a

bill to the bartender who was standing, amazed, near the cash register. He closed the door of the bar behind him.

After a moment he opened it again and stuck his head back in. "God damn everybody!" he yelled.

After the sailor had been revived by his friends and pushed back on a bar stool, the man with the trumpet case, who had been on the far side of the stout drinker, moved nearer to George.

"Interesting story he told, wasn't it?" he said cheerily. "Of course, there wasn't anything to it."

"Oh, I don't know," George answered perversely. "There might have been."

"Oh, no," the man with the trumpet case said positively. He shook his head so vigorously that the folds of his pious, starched, dewlapped face trembled. "Nothing like that."

"How can you be sure?"

"Because . . ." He hesitated. "Because I know what the real reasons for our difficulties are."

"Well, what's your explanation?"

"I—I don't know whether I ought to say this," the starched man said coyly. He put his head on one side and looked at George bright-eyed. Then, as if fearing George's patience might be on the edge of exhaustion, he said, quite quickly, "It's the last trump."

"Who's the last trump?" the man on the bar stool around the corner from George asked, leaning forward to listen. George knew him by sight; his name was Atkinson.

"Nobody," the starched man answered. "I meant that the last trump ought to have been blown ages ago. The world is long overdue for judgment."

"H. G. Wells story," George murmured.

"I beg your pardon?" said the starched man.

"Nothing." George motioned to the bartender and ordered a round of drinks. Atkinson took gin and ginger ale, and the starched man kirschwasser.

"Why hasn't the trump been blown?" Atkinson asked, with the air of one tolerating noisy children.

"Because it's lost," the starched man replied promptly. "When

the time came to blow it, it wasn't in Heaven. This wicked, wicked world! Ages ago it should have been summoned to meet its master." He drooped his eyelids.

George felt his tongue aching with the repression of his wish to say, "Plagiarist!" Atkinson said, "Oh, fooey. How do you know the trump's been lost?"

"Because I have it here," the starchy gentleman answered. "Right here." He patted his trumpet case.

George and Atkinson exchanged a look. George said, "Let's see it."

"I don't think I'd better . . ."

"Oh, go on!"

"Well . . . No, I'd better not."

Atkinson leaned his elbows on the bar and rested his chin on his interlaced fingers. "I expect there's nothing in the trumpet case actually," he said indifferently. "I expect it's only a gambit of his."

The soft, wrinkled skin of the man who was drinking kirsch-wasser flushed red around the eyes. He put the trumpet case down on the bar in front of George with a thump, and snapped open the lid. Atkinson and George bent over it eagerly.

The trumpet case was lined with glossy white silk, like a coffin. Against the white fabric, gleaming with an incredible velvety luster, lay a trumpet of deepest midnight blue. It might have been black, but it wasn't; it was the color of deep space where it lies softly, like a caress, for trillions of miles around some regal, blazing star. The bell of the trumpet was fluted and curved like the flower of a morning glory.

Atkinson whistled. After a moment he paid the trumpet the ultimate tribute. "Gosh," he said.

The man with the trumpet said nothing, but his little mouth pursed in a small, tight, nasty smile.

"Where'd you get it?" George queried.

"I'm not saying."

"How do you know it's the last trump?" Atkinson asked.

The starchy man shrugged his shoulders. "What else could it be?" he asked.

The door at the front of the bar opened and three men came in. George watched them absently as they walked the length of the bar counter and went into the rear. "But . . . you mean if this thing were blown, the world would come to an end? There'd be the last judgment?"

"I imagine."

"I don't believe it," Atkinson said after a minute. "I just don't believe it. It's an extraordinary looking trumpet, I admit, but it can't be . . . that."

"Ohhhhh?"

"Yes. If it's what you say, why don't you blow it?"

The starchy man seemed disconcerted. He licked his lips. Then he said, in rather a hostile tone, "You mean you want me to blow? You mean you're ready to meet your maker—you and all the rest of the world—right now? Right this minute? With all your sins, with all your errors of commission and omission, unforgiven and unshriven on your head?"

"Sure. That's right. Why not? The longer the world goes on existing, the worse it'll get. As to sins and all that, I'll take my chances. They couldn't be much worse than what—" Atkinson made a small gesture that seemed to enclose in itself the whole miserable, explosive terrestrial globe—"than what we have now."

Under his breath, George quoted, "'We doctors know a hopeless case—'"

The starchy man turned to him. "Do you agree with him, young man?" he demanded.

"Yep."

The man with the trumpet turned bright red. He reached into the case and picked up the trumpet. As he lifted it through the air, George noticed what a peculiarly eye-catching quality the celestial object had. Its color and gloss had the effect on the eye that a blare of horns has on the ear. Heads began to turn toward it. In no time at all, everyone in the bar was watching the starchy man.

He seemed to pause a little, as if to make sure that he had the attention of his audience. Then he drew a deep, deep breath. He set the trumpet to his lips.

From the rear of the bar there burst out a jangling, skirling, shrieking, droning uproar. It was an amazing noise; a noise, George thought, to freeze the blood and make the hair stand upright. There must have been ultrasonics in it. It sounded like a thousand pigs being slaughtered with electric carving knives.

Everyone in the bar had jumped at the sudden clamor, but the effect on the starchy man was remarkable. He jumped convulsively, as if he had sat on a damp tarantula. His eyes moved wildly; George thought he had turned pale.

He shouted, "They're after me!" He shouted it so loudly that it was perfectly audible even above the demoniac noise of the bagpipes. Then he grabbed up the trumpet case, slammed the trumpet in it, and ran out of the bar on his neat little patent leather feet.

The two bagpipers came out from the rear of the bar, still playing, and began to march toward the front. Apparently they had noticed nothing at all of the episode of the dark blue trumpet. The third man followed in the rear, beating on a small drum. From time to time he would put the drum sticks to his upper lip and seem to smell at them.

"Remarkable, isn't it?" Atkinson said to George over the racket. "Only bar I ever was in where they kept bagpipes in the rear to amuse the customers. The owner's Scottish, you know."

The instrumentalists reached the front of the bar. They stood there a moment skirling. Then they executed an about-face and marched slowly to the rear. They stood there while they finished their number. It was long, with lots of tootling. At last they laid their instruments aside, advanced to the bar, and sat down on three bar stools near the center. They ordered Irish whiskey.

"Wonder where he got that trumpet," Atkinson said thoughtfully, reverting to the man with the trumpet case. "Stole it somewhere, I shouldn't be surprised."

"Too bad he didn't get to blow it," George answered. He ordered Atkinson and himself another drink.

"Oh, that!" Atkinson laughed shortly. "Nothing would have happened. It was just a fancy horn. You surely don't believe that

wild yarn he told us? Why, I know what the real reason for all our troubles is!"

George sighed. He drew a design on the bar counter with his finger. "Another one," he said.

"Eh? What? Oh, you were talking to yourself. As I was saying, I know the real reason. Are you familiar with Tantrist magic and its principles?"

"Unhunh. No."

Atkinson frowned. "You almost sound as if you didn't want to hear about this," he observed. "But I was talking about Tantrist magic. One of its cardinal tenets, you know, is the magic power of certain syllables. For instance, if you persistently repeat Avalokiteshvara's name, you'll be assured of a happy rebirth in Heaven. Other sounds have a malign and destructive power. And so on."

George looked about him. It was growing late; the bar was emptying. Except for himself and Atkinson, the pipers and the drummer, and a man around the corner of the bar from George, who had been sitting there silently against the wall all evening, the stools were empty. He looked at Atkinson again.

"About 1920," Atkinson was saying, "a lama in a remote little valley in Tibet—" George noticed that he pronounced the word in the austere fashion that makes it rhyme with gibbet—"got a terrific yen for one of the native girls. She was a very attractive girl by native standards, round and brown and plump and tight, like a little bird. The lama couldn't keep his eyes off her, and he didn't want to keep his hands off either. Unfortunately, he belonged to a lamistic order that was very strict about its rule of chastity. And besides that, he was really a religious man.

"He knew there was one circumstance, and one only, under which he could enjoy the girl without committing any sin. He decided to wait for it.

"A few months later, when the girl was out pasturing the buffalo, or feeding the silk worms, or something, she saw the lama coming running down the side of the hill toward her. He was in a terrific froth. When he got up to her, he made a certain request.

'No,' the girl answered, 'my mother told me I mustn't.' You see, she was a well-brought up girl."

George was looking at Atkinson and frowning hard. "Go on," he said.

"I *am* going on," Atkinson answered. "The lama told her to go home and ask her mother if it wasn't all right to do what the holy man told her. He said to hurry. So she did.

"When she came back the lama was sitting on the field in a disconsolate position. She told him it was all right, her mother had said to mind him. He shook his head. He said, 'The Dalai Lama has just died. I thought you and I could coöperate to reincarnate him. Under the circumstances, it wouldn't have been a sin. But now it's too late. Heaven has willed otherwise. The job has already been attended to.' And he pointed over to a corner of the field where two donkeys were copulating.

"The girl began to laugh. As I said, she was a well-brought up girl, but she couldn't help it. She laughed and laughed. She almost split her sides laughing. And the poor lama had to sit there listening while she laughed.

"You can't excuse him, but you can understand it. He'd wanted her so much, he'd thought he was going to get her, and then those donkeys— Well, he began to curse. He began to curse those terrible, malign Tantrist curses. He's been cursing ever since.

"Ever since 1920, he's been cursing. Once in a while he pauses for breath, and we think things are going to get better, but he always starts in again. He says those dreadful Tantrist syllables over and over, and they go bonging around the world like the notes of enormous brass bells ringing disaster. War and famine and destruction and revolution and death—all in the Tantrist syllables. He knows, of course, that he'll be punished by years and years of rebirths, the worst possible kind of karma, but he can't help it. He just goes on saying those terrible syllables."

George looked at him coldly. "*Two Kinds of Time*," he said. "Hunh?"

"I said, you read that story in a book about China called *Two Kinds of Time*. I read it myself. The donkeys, the lama, the girl—

they're all in there. The only original part was what you said about the Tantrist curses, and you probably stole that from someplace else." George halted. After a moment he said passionately, "What's the *matter* with everybody tonight?"

"Oh, fozzle," Atkinson replied lightly. "*Om mani padme hum.*" He picked up his hat and left the bar.

After a minute or so, the two pipers followed him. That left George, the silent man in the corner, and the instrumentalist who had played on the drum. George decided to have one more drink. Then he'd go home.

The silent man who was leaning against the wall began to speak.

"They were all wrong," he said.

George regarded him with nausea. He thought of leaving, but the bartender was already bringing his drink. He tried to call up enough force to say, "Shut up," but heart failed him. He drooped his head passively.

"Did you ever notice the stars scattered over the sky?" the man in the corner asked. He had a deep, rumbling voice.

"Milky Way?" George mumbled. Better hurry and get this over with.

"The Milky Way is one example," the stranger conceded. "Only one. There are millions of worlds within the millions of galaxies."

"Yeah."

"All those millions of burning worlds." He was silent for so long that George's hopes rose. Then he said, "They look pretty hot, don't they? But they're good to eat."

"Hunh?"

"The stars, like clams . . ."

"Beg your pardon," George enunciated. He finished his drink. "Misjudged you. You're original."

The man in the corner did not seem to have listened. "The worlds are like clams," he said rapidly, "and the skies at night present us with the glorious spectacle of a celestial clambake. They put them on the fire, and when they've been on the fire long enough, they open. They're getting this world of yours ready.

When it's been on the fire a little longer, it'll open. Explode."

George realized that that last drink had been one too many. He didn't believe what the man in the corner was saying. He wouldn't. But he couldn't help finding a dreadful sort of logic in it. "How'ju know this?" he asked feebly at last.

The man in the corner seemed to rise and billow. Before George's horrified and popping eyes, he grew larger and larger, like a balloon inflating. George drew back on the bar stool; he was afraid his face would be buried in the vast unnatural bulk.

"Because," said the inflating man in a high, twanging voice, "because I'm one of the clam-eaters!"

This horrid statement proved too much for George's wavering sobriety. He blinked. Then he slid backward off the bar stool and collapsed softly on the floor. His eyes closed.

The billowing form of the clam-eater tightened and condensed into that of a singularly handsome young man. He was dressed in winged sandals and a winged hat; from his naked body there came a soft golden light.

For a moment he stood over George, chuckling at the success of his joke. His handsome, jolly face was convulsed with mirth. Then, giving George a light, revivifying tap on the shoulder with the herald's wand he carried, the divine messenger left the bar.

The hypnotic quality of this unsettlingly believable story of something new in the way of threats from outer space may be explained in part by the fact that under another name the author is one of America's well-known, highly respected poets.

The Hypnoglyph

by John Anthony

Jaris held the object cupped in his hand while his thumb stroked the small hollow in its polished side. "It's really the prize of my collection," he said, "but there isn't any real name for it. I call it the hypnoglyph."

"Hypnoglyph?" Maddick said, putting down a superbly rick-racked Venusian opal the size of a goose egg.

Jaris smiled at the younger man. "Hypnoglyph," he said. "Here, take a look at it."

Maddick held it in his palm stroking it softly, letting his thumb run gently over the little hollow. "This, the prize of your collection?" he said. "Why, it's nothing but a chunk of wood."

"A man," Jaris said, "may be described as not much more than a chunk of meat, but he has some unusual properties."

Maddick, his thumb still stroking the little hollow, swept his eye over the treasure room. "I'll say he has. I've never in my life seen more property in one room."

Jaris' voice gently brushed aside the edge of greed in the younger man's voice. "It has not been the longest life to date. Perhaps it even has something left to learn."

Maddick flushed a moment, then pursed his lips almost imperceptibly and shrugged. "Well, what's it for?" he said. He held the thing in front of him and watched his fingers stroke it.

Jaris chuckled again. "It's for exactly what you're doing. The thing is irresistible. Once you've picked it up, your thumb just automatically strokes that little hollow, and it just automatically hates to stop stroking."

Maddick's voice took on the tone that the very young reserve for humoring the very old. "It's a pleasant gadget," he said. "But why the rather pretentious name?"

"Pretentious?" Jaris said. "I had simply thought of it as descriptive. The thing actually is hypnotic." He smiled watching Maddick's fingers still playing with the thing. "You may recall a sculptor named Gainsdale who fooled with such things toward the end of the twentieth century. He founded a school of sculpture called Tropism."

Maddick shrugged, still absorbed in the object. "Everyone and his brother started a school of something back there; I guess I missed that one."

"It was an interesting theory," Jaris said, picking up an Arcurian space-crystal and watching the play of light rays from it. "He argued—soundly enough as I see it—that the surface of every organism has certain innate tactile responses. A cat innately likes to be stroked in certain ways. A heliotrope innately moves to face the light."

"And the leg," Maddick quipped, "innately likes to be pulled. So far we've covered some basic facts about tropism with a small *t*. What of it?"

"It isn't the facts so much as the application that's interesting," Jaris said, ignoring the younger man's rudeness. "Gainsdale simply carried his awareness of tropism farther than any one had before. Anyone on earth at least. He argued that every surface of the body innately responds to certain shapes and textures and he set out to carve objects that—as he put it—made the bodily surfaces innately happy. He made objects for rubbing up and down the neck, objects for rubbing across the forehead. He even claimed he could cure headaches that way."

"That's nothing but old Chinese medicine," Maddick said. "I bought an eighth century talisman for rubbing out rheumatism just last week. Curio stuff."

"Gainsdale must certainly have known the Oriental glyptics," Jaris agreed, "but he was trying to systematize the idea behind them into a series of principles. He took a fling at reviving the

Japanese netsuke, those polished hand-pieces the old Samurais dangled from their belts. But Gainsdale wanted to carve for the whole body. He tried psychic jewelry at one point and designed bracelets that innately pleased the arm. For a while he got to designing chairs that were irresistible to the buttocks."

"Quite an art," Maddick said, turning the object in his hand, working the little hollow around and around in his fist and then bringing it back to where his thumb could stroke along the tiny hollow. "You might say he got right down to fundamentals." He smiled at Jaris as if looking for acknowledgment of his wit, but found no response there.

"He was, in fact, quite a man," Jaris said seriously. "Maybe the chairs and buttocks gave him the idea but after that he got to experimenting with gimmicks that would preserve sexual potency. The League of Something or Other made him stop that, but it is worth noting that his last child was born when he was 84."

Maddick leered. "At last—a practical application!"

Jaris looked down at Maddick's hand still stroking the hypnograph, the fingers moving as if they had entered a life of their own. "After that," he said, ignoring Maddick's still lingering leer, "he got to designing sleeping blocks—wooden pillows something like the Japanese porcelain block, but molded to give the head pleasure. He claimed it produced good dreams. But most of all he sculptured for the hand, just as the Japanese carvers of talismans finally settled on the netsuke for their definitive work. After all the hand is not only the natural tactile organ in one sense; it also has the kind of mobility that can respond to texture and mass most pleasurably."

Jaris put down the space-crystal and stood watching Maddick's hand. "Just as you're doing," he said. "Gainsdale was after the object the human hand could not resist."

Maddick looked down at the thing in his hand, the fingers working over it as if they were alone with it somewhere apart from the arm and mind they grew from. "I must say it is pleasant," he said. "But isn't all this just a bit far-fetched? You'd hardly argue that pleasure is absolutely irresistible. If we have no control

over our lust for pleasure why aren't we strangling one another for the pleasure of stroking this thing?"

"Maybe," Jaris said gently, "because I want less than you do."

Maddick let his eyes sweep the treasure room. "Maybe you can damn well afford to," he said, and for a moment there was no suavity in his voice. He seemed to be aware of the gaff himself, for he changed the subject immediately. "But I thought you collected nothing but extraterrestrial stuff. How come this?"

"That," said Jaris, "is the curious coincidence. Or one of the curious coincidences. The one you're holding is extraterrestrial."

"And the other curious coincidences?" Maddick said.

Jaris lit one of his poisonous cheroots. "I might as well begin at the beginning," he said through the smoke.

"Something told me there was a story coming," Maddick said. "You collectors are all alike. I've never known one that wasn't a yarn spinner. I think it's the real reason for the collection."

Jaris smiled. "A professional disease. Do we collect so we can tell yarns, or tell yarns so we can collect? Maybe if I tell the yarn well enough I'll collect you. Well, sit down and I'll do my best: a new audience, a new opportunity."

He waved Maddick into an elaborately carved bone chair, placed the humidor, the drug sachets, and a decanter of Danubian brandy within easy reach of him, and sat down behind the desk with a wave of the hand that told Maddick to help himself.

"I suppose," he said after that pause-before-the-yarn that no story teller can omit, "I suppose one of the reasons I prize the thing is because I got it on my last blast into deep space. As you see," he added, waving his hand about him lightly, "I made the mistake of coming back rich, and it killed the wanderlust. Now I'm earthbound by my own avidity."

Maddick sat stroking the smooth little hollow with his thumb. "Being filthy rich is hardly the worst fate imaginable, I should think."

But Jaris' mind was on his story. "I'd been prospecting for space-crystals out toward Deneb Kaitos," he continued, "and I'd really struck bonanza, an asteroid belt just popping with the lus-

cious things. We had the ship bulging with enough of them to buy Terra twice over, and we were starting back when we found that Deneb Kaitos had a planetary system. There had been several expeditions out that way before with no mention of the system and we had been so busy hauling in space-crystals that we hadn't been doing much looking. But I realized then that what I had thought was just an asteroid belt was really a broken-up planet orbiting around its sun. With the fragments running about 8 per cent pure diamond it was no wonder we'd hit the mother lode of them all.

"We ran a quick survey on the system and decided to put into DK-8 for the specimen run-over and life-forms data. DK-6 gave some indications of life-forms but hardly enough to be worth the extra stop. DK-8, on the other hand, ran high. So high it looked like a good chance for Federation Prize Money. With a ship load of space-crystals, even a million Units seemed small change, but it would be a kick to turn up a new Intelligence Group. The Columbus complex, you know.

"At any rate we put into DK-8, and that's where I got that thing you're holding. On DK-8 it's a hunting implement."

Maddick looked puzzled. "Hunting," he said. "You mean the way David got Goliath? Zingo?"

"No," Jaris said. "It's not a missile. It's a snare. The natives set them out and trap animals with them."

Still stroking it, Maddick looked at the gadget. "Oh come now," he said. "You mean they just set them out, wait for termites to invade, and then eat the termites? That kind of snare?"

Jaris' voice stiffened for an instant. "There are queerer things than that in space." Then his voice softened. "You're young yet," he said. "You have time enough. That gadget, for instance: you wouldn't believe a culture was founded on it. You're not ready to believe."

Maddick's smile said: "Well, after all you can't expect me to swallow this stuff, can you?" Aloud he said, "A yarn's a yarn. Let's have it."

"Yes," Jaris said, "I suppose it is incredible. In a way, that's

what space is: the constant recurrence of the incredible. After a while you forget what a norm is. Then you're a space hand." He looked off a moment across the shining collection around him. "DK-8, for example. Once the indicator told us to expect intelligence, it was no surprise to come on side-humans. By that time it had been universally established that you can expect intelligence only in primate and quasi-primate forms. Unless you've got the prehensile hand and the supraorbital arch there's just no way for intelligence to get started. A monkey develops a hook for swinging through the trees and an eye for measuring distances between leaps and he's fitted for his environment. But it just happens that the hand is good for picking things up and the eye is good for looking at them closely, and pretty soon the monkey is picking things up and examining them and beginning to get ideas. And pretty soon he's beginning to use tools. An ungulate couldn't use a tool in a billion years; he has nothing to hold it with. There's no reason why there mightn't be some sort of lizard intelligence I suppose, except that it just doesn't seem to happen. Probably too low-grade a nervous system."

Jaris suddenly caught himself, realizing that his voice had been running away with the enthusiasm of his argument. "I really haven't been back very long," he said with a smile. "That's the sort of argument that gets hot in space." His voice softened again. "I was saying we weren't much surprised to come on side-humans once we'd got an intelligence indication. . . ."

"Odd that I've never heard of it," Maddick said. "I keep pretty well posted on that sort of thing. And surely a really close siding—"

"The fact is," Jaris said, interrupting in his turn, "we didn't make a report."

Maddick's voice sharpened with surprise. "Good heavens, man, and you're telling me? What on earth's to keep me from turning you over to Federation Space Base and getting your mind picked for it?" Once again his eyes swept the treasure room as if running an inventory and his lips pursed shrewdly for an instant. Then his voice loosened. "If I believed you, that is."

Jaris leaned back in his chair as if buried in thought and for a

moment his voice seemed to be coming up from a cave shaft. "It doesn't really matter," he said. "And besides," he added with a smile, his voice growing near again, "you don't, as you say, believe me."

Maddick looked down at his hand still stroking the polished sides of the gadget. The thumb snaked out over the little polished dimple. In, up and back, in, up and back. Without raising his head, he raised his eyes to meet Jaris'. "Should I?" he said. Once more his eyes flicked over the treasure room, resting longest on the cabinet of space-crystals.

Jaris noted his look and smiled. "I've often thought myself what a lovely target I'd make for a blackmailer."

Maddick looked away quickly. "If the blackmailer could believe you."

Jaris smiled. "Always that doubt," he said. "What would you say if I told you the siding was so close that Terrans can mate with DKs?"

Maddick paused a long minute before answering, his eyes fixed on the thing in his hand, watching his fingers curl about and stroke it. He shook his head as if putting something out of his mind. "I seem to be beyond surprises at this point. Strangely, I believe you. And strangely, I know I should be arguing that it's impossible."

Suddenly his voice flared up, "Look here," he said, "what is all this rigmarole?" Again his voice calmed abruptly. "All right. Yes, sure. I believe you. I'm crazy, God knows, but I believe you."

"Enough to turn me in?"

Maddick flushed without answering.

"I'm afraid they'd only tell you it's impossible," Jaris said. "Pity too," he added wearily. "As I was saying I'd be such lush pickings for a blackmailer." He paused a moment, then added gently, "Don't worry about it, son."

Maddick's voice did not rise to anger. He looked down at his hand still stroking the thing. "Is that a threat?" he said indifferently.

Jaris shook his head. "A regret," he said. He blew out a cloud of smoke and spoke again more brightly. "Besides, all the arguments

against its being possible are too sound. Life forms can mate across some of the branches of divergent evolution if the species are related by some reasonably proximate common ancestor. The lion and the tiger, for instance, or the horse and the jackass. But it doesn't work for convergent evolution. You can evolve a species somewhere in space that resembles man, and with space enough and time enough you can evolve a lot of them, but the chemistry and physiology of egg and sperm are too tricky to come close enough without a common ancestor. Nevertheless Terrans can mate with DK women, and have mated with them. That may sound incredible, said in this room, but after a while you find nothing is incredible in deep space."

"Deep space," Maddick said softly. His voice sounded as if it were stroking the words with the same sensuous pleasure his fingers found in stroking the polished thing in his hand.

Jaris caught the movement of his voice and nodded. "You've time yet. You'll get there. But to get back to DK-8. The only real difference between DKs and humans is the hair and the skin structure. DK-8 has a dense and tropical atmosphere. It's rather high in CO_2 and perpetually misty. The sun's rays have a hard time getting through the atmosphere. Also the planet is all-tropical. Consequently the animal life from which the DKs evolved never had to develop a fur covering. Hair is unknown on the planet. Instead, the DK life-forms developed a skin structure extremely sensitive to whatever diffused sun rays they can get. The skin is soft and pallid as a slug's. If a DK were exposed to the direct rays of Sol for a few minutes, he'd die of sunburn."

Jaris held up the cheroot before him and blew a puff of smoke over its lit end. "Nature," he said, "always has a trick of trying to deal two cards at once. The prehensile hand developed for one reason and became useful for something else. Just so, the DK's tremendously sensitive skin developed originally to absorb the most possible sun, but became in time the basis for a tremendously developed tactile sense.

"That goes for the lower animals too. Their tropisms are fantastically dominant over their other responses. Once an animal

starts stroking one of those gadgets as you're doing, it simply cannot stop."

Maddick smiled and looked at his hand without answering. The polished sides of the thing gleamed dully, and his thumb ran down into and over the little hollow. Down into and over. Down into and over.

"You might almost say," Jaris continued, "that the DKs have developed a tactile science to a degree unknown to us. The energy we have put into a tool culture, they have put into a tactile culture. It isn't a highly developed society in our terms: a rigid tribal matriarchy with a few basic tools that only the women are permitted to operate, and at that only a special clan of the women. The other women lounge about on delicately arranged hill terraces and just lie motionless soaking up sun energy or working up a little voodoo mostly based on hypnotism and tactile gratification."

His voice grew softer and slightly distant. "As you might expect, they grow incredibly obese. At first it seemed repulsive to see them lying so. But on DK-8 obesity is really a survival characteristic. It makes for more surface to absorb sun energy. And the women have such perfect control of their skin surfaces that their bodies remain strangely well-proportioned."

He leaned back and almost closed his eyes. "Amazing control," he half whispered. Then suddenly he chuckled. "But you're probably wondering how they work such hard wood so perfectly with practically no tools. If you look closely you'll find that what you're holding is really grainless. Actually it isn't wood at all, but a kind of huge seed, something like an avocado nut. As you know, you can carve a fresh avocado nut almost as easily as you mold clay, but when you let it dry, it becomes extremely hard. Extremely hard."

"Extremely hard," Maddick agreed distantly.

"The women of the proper clan work these things, and the men set them out in the forests. As you might suppose, the men are a rather scrawny lot, and would starve soon enough if they had to depend on their own muscular prowess as hunters. These gadgets

take care of all that, however. The animals, with their extremely high tactile suggestibility, come through the forest and find one of these things in their way. They begin to stroke it and feel it, and they just can't stop. The men don't even kill them; all slaughtering is handled by the ruling clan of women. The men simply wait till the animal has worked itself into the right state, and then lead it back to the slaughtering compound—still under hypnosis of course."

"Of course," Maddick agreed, his fingers working softly and rhythmically.

Jaris leaned back. His politeness was unfaltering, but now there was a touch of triumph in his voice. "There's really only one other thing you need to know. The men used to have unmanageable spells. As a result, it has become traditional to hypnotize them practically at birth. The practice is untold centuries old.

"Unfortunately, however, nature still deals a tricky hand. Keep the species in abeyance long enough and it stops thrusting toward its own development. The generations of hypnosis have had the effect of breeding the life-wish out of the males. It's as if the genes and the sperm were just slowly quitting. When we landed on DK-8 there were hardly enough men left to work the traps."

He leaned forward, smiling. "You can imagine what a treasure our crew must have seemed to the tribal leaders, once it was discovered that we could interbreed: new vigorous males, a new start, fresh blood for the life stream."

He paused and his tone became steady and dry. "I think perhaps you will understand now why I came back alone. The only male ever to leave DK-8. Although," he added, "in one sense I've never really left it."

". . . never . . . really . . . left . . . it . . ." Maddick said.

Jaris nodded and came around the desk. Leaning over Maddick, he blew a puff of smoke directly into his open eyes. Maddick did not stir. His eyes remained fixed straight ahead and he remained fixed motionless in the chair. Only the fingers of his right hand continued to move, curling about the polished thing, while his thumb flicked out and over the little hollow.

Jaris straightened, still smiling sadly, picked up a curiously wrought little bell from the desk and tinkled it once.

Across the room, a door swung open on a darkened alcove in which something huge and pale showed dimly.

"He is ready, darling," Jaris said.

Ogden Nash here offers, surprisingly enough, a horror-ballad, in which the peerless verse-satirist reveals an unexpected familiarity with the history of true murder.

A Tale of the Thirteenth Floor

by Ogden Nash

The hands of the clock were reaching high
In an old midtown hotel;
I name no name, but its sordid fame
Is table talk in Hell.
I name no name, but Hell's own flame
Illumes the lobby garish,
A gilded snare just off Times Square
For the virgins of the parish.

The revolving door swept the grimy floor
Like a crinoline grotesque,
And a lowly bum from an ancient slum
Crept furtively past the desk.
His footsteps sift into the lift
As a knife in the sheath is slipped,
Stealthy and swift into the lift
As a vampire into a crypt.

Old Maxie, the elevator boy,
Was reading an ode by Shelley,
But he dropped the ode as it were a toad
When the gun jammed into his belly.
There came a whisper as soft as mud
In the bed of an old canal:
"Take me up to the suite of Pinball Pete,
The rat who betrayed my gal."

The lift doth rise with groans and sighs
Like a duchess for the waltz,
Then in middle shaft, like a duchess daft,
It changes its mind and halts.
The bum bites lip as the landlocked ship
Doth neither fall nor rise,
But Maxie the elevator boy
Regards him with burning eyes.
"First to explore the thirteenth floor,"
Says Maxie, "would be wise."

Quoth the bum, "There is moss on your double cross,
I have been this way before,
I have cased the joint at every point,
And there is no thirteenth floor.
The architect he skipped direct
From twelve unto fourteen,
There is twelve below and fourteen above,
And nothing in between,
For the vermin who dwell in this hotel
Could never abide thirteen."

Said Max, "Thirteen, that floor obscene,
Is hidden from human sight;
But once a year it doth appear,
On this Walpurgis night.
Ere you peril your soul in murderer's role,
Heed those who sinned of yore;
The path they trod led away from God,
And onto the thirteenth floor,
Where those they slew, a grisly crew,
Reproach them forevermore.

"We are higher than twelve and below fourteen,"
Said Maxie to the bum,
"And the sickening draft that taints the shaft
Is a whiff of kingdom come.

The sickening draft that taints the shaft
 Blows through the devil's door!"
 And he squashed the latch like a fungus patch,
 And revealed the thirteenth floor.

It was cheap cigars like lurid scars
 That glowed in the rancid gloom,
 The murk was a-boil with fusel oil
 And the reek of stale perfume.
 And round and round there dragged and wound
 A loathsome conga chain,
 The square and the hep in slow lock step,
 The slayer and the slain.
 (For the souls of the victims ascend on high,
 But their bodies below remain.)

The clean souls fly to their home in the sky,
 But their bodies remain below
 To pursue the Cains who emptied their veins
 And harry them to and fro.
 When life is extinct each corpse is linked
 To its gibbering murderer,
 As a chicken is bound with wire around
 The neck of a killer cur.

Handcuffed to Hate come Doctor Waite
 (*He tastes the poison now*),
 And Ruth and Judd and a head of blood
 With horns upon its brow.
 Up sashays Nan with her feathery fan
 From *Floradora* bright;
 She never hung for Caesar Young,
 But she's dancing with him tonight.

Here's the bulging hip and the foam-flecked lip
 Of the mad dog, Vincent Coll,

And over there that ill-met pair,
 Becker and Rosenthal.
 Here's Legs and Dutch and a dozen such
 Of braggart bullies and brutes,
 And each one bends 'neath the weight of friends
 Who are wearing concrete suits.

Now the damned make way for the double damned
 Who emerge with shuffling pace
 From the nightmare zone of persons unknown,
 With neither name nor face.
 And poor Dot King to one doth cling,
 Joined in a ghastly jig,
 While Elwell doth jape at a goblin shape
 And tickle it with his wig.

See Rothstein pass like breath on a glass,
 The original Black Sox kid;
 He ruffles the pack, riding piggyback
 On the killer whose name he hid.
 And smeared like brine on a slaver's swine,
 Starr Faithful, once so fair,
 Drawn from the sea to her debauchee,
 With the salt sand in her hair.

And still they come, and from the bum
 The icy sweat doth spray;
 His white lips scream as in a dream,
 "For God's sake, let's away!
 If ever I meet with Pinball Pete
 I will not seek his gore,
 Lest a treadmill grim I must trudge with him
 On the hideous thirteenth floor."

"For you I rejoice," said Maxie's voice,
 "And I bid you go in peace,

But I am late for a dancing date
That nevermore will cease.
So remember, friend, as your way you wend,
That it would have happened to you,
But *I* turned the heat on Pinball Pete;
You see—I had a daughter, too!”

The bum reached out and he tried to shout,
But the door in his face was slammed,
And silent as stone he rode down alone
From the floor of the double damned.

It seems probable that only Oliver La Farge could give Cochise, the great Apache leader of the 1860s and '70s, such reality in the midst of a fantasy, and such dignity in the midst of a delightfully comic tale. . . .

Spud and Cochise

by Oliver La Farge

Too much light—too much heat, too much sand and rock, but above all too much light made the desert intolerable, the brilliance striking everything to whiteness. Not the dead white of a painted board, but shades and variations, yellowish in a pale way over some of the sand, in other places greenish, rocks that might turn out purple if the sun went behind a cloud, mesas that might have red in their sides. The faint tones were mineral, weak but still harsh. What vegetation managed to live was also pale and ineffectual.

In the still air, the strawberry roan's hoofs stirred up a powdery dust-haze at each step, the fine stuff rose, covering legs and flanks and mane until the animal became a uniform, pinkish gray, it settled on Spud's spurs, his boots, his rifle in its scabbard, his threadbare blue jeans, his pistol, his cotton shirt, the yellow silk scarf at his throat, his straggly mustache, his leather face, and battered, wide hat. Spud was a small, pepper-and-salt man anyhow; now he looked like a flour sack with nothing in it.

He was too dry to smoke or sing, too disciplined to let his mind run on drinks. He made himself easy in the saddle, forebore to count the miles that still lay between himself and Spareribs, and tried to occupy himself by observing the Mil Huesos desert. This was not interesting, especially since he had seen it all before. It took some thought to follow the trail. In many sandy stretches there was nothing to follow. Where the footing turned to what looked like cosmic cinders, or where it went over rock, there was a thin ribbon of special texture, something hardly visible, but which to Spud proclaimed the road. Alongside it he noted a scattering of

ding on one place. That's the nearest thing to company I've had in two days, he thought. He watched it slide by him as the roan maintained his fast, monotonous, mile-eating walk. He lifted his hat an inch to cool his head, shifted his revolver to a better position, and settled even more slackly in the saddle.

A long, low, white ridge with greenish shading on its upper part ran out to a point a short distance ahead. That was where he would hit the main trail. He looked at the ridge, then over to the western mountains, a pile of stone skeletons, bluish without promise of growth or coolness, on the horizon, then back to the earth nearby. The bones of a horse came into view. I'll bet you was a godsend to the ants here, he thought.

A pillar of dust, like to his own but broader, rose from behind the ridge, moving slowly to meet his course. He touched the handle of his gun while he looked at it. Two horses, or a rider and a packhorse. Might be company. Someone coming from Spareribs. His gray eyes became careful, the dust-filled wrinkles about them drawing together.

Just at the end of the point the dust-cloud stopped, thinned, faded away. Spud became more watchful. Things that go out of sight, that act differently, require caution. He loosed the carbine in its scabbard, set himself almost straight in the saddle, and shortened his reins slightly.

He was near the point now. Over its low top he saw two horses, one saddled, one packed. As he cleared it he saw a person—a woman, for God's sake—sitting in the shade of her horse, hunched up, looking gloomy. She was all dust, too, her and her print shirt and divided skirt; from a little distance you couldn't tell anything about her barring that she was white.

Curious, Spud turned the roan toward her. A shotgun was slung from her saddle horn by a female arrangement of strings. She raised her head slightly, watching him coming without interest or friendliness. Her animals were poor, they stood with low heads at the end of hollow necks, their manes were heavy with dust. He stopped a few yards from her, raised his hat and said, "Good evenin', ma'am."

"Evenin'." Her voice was neutral, her eyes ungreeting.

Curiosity still urged. "Hot, ain't it?"

"Yeah. It's hot. That's what this country's for."

"That's right." Spud untied his canteen. "Could you use a drink o' water? I'd be pleased if you'd join me, ma'am."

She smiled unexpectedly, as at a sour joke. "Thanks, yes."

He moved his horse nearer, reached down the canteen of more than tepid water, and watched her drink sparingly.

"I'm headin' for Spareribs," he said, bringing himself as near to inquiry as courtesy would allow.

"I'm headin' *from* Spareribs." She stressed the "from." After a pause, as though to make up for needless rudeness, she said, "I'm hittin' for Tucson and I figure to camp at Ojo Amarillo."

Spud glanced at the sun, well past noon, and said, "If you'll pardon me, ma'am, you must ha' started kind o' late. I don't think you can make Ojo Amarillo today. I—I kind o' think maybe you'd do better if you come back to Spareribs and make a nice, early start tomorrow. You'd make it easy then."

"Thank you. I ain't goin' back to Spareribs."

"Yes'm." Spud felt rebuked. "Excuse me havin' interfered. I guess I'll be goin' along." He lifted his rein hand, then hesitated, looking again at the woman's face. Hard to make out under the dust, youngish anyway, familiar . . .

"I'll beg you to excuse me again. It jest kind o' seems to me I seen you somewheres before."

She sighed, then smiled slightly with one corner of her mouth. "Likely you have," she said indifferently. "Was you ever to the Golden Girl in Tucson?"

Spud was taken completely aback, unseated to the extent of saying, "Oh, are you—" before he could check himself.

"Yeah, I am." She wiped her mouth hard with the back of her hand and looked at it. "I was, anyway, and I guess I will be again. Right now it seems to have worn off."

Spud heard the humility, the sound of despair. He fumbled for words. He could think of nothing delicate, and finally came out flat with what moved in him.

"Can I help you any ways at all?"

She stared at him, curiosity, distrust, a little wonder. "I don't reckon. I'm hooked, I guess. Earmarked."

Another pause followed. Spud took out the makings. "Will you have a smoke with me, ma'am?"

"All right."

He passed the makings down, then rolled himself one. Indians are right about tobacco. The two smokes lit from a common flame, of herb from one sack, started a friendlier circuit between them.

She said, "I kind of remember you. You busted Buckskin Smith out the window."

"That was me."

"We was grateful to you. He was real ugly."

They smoked awhile in silence.

"I'll tell you," she said. "It'll do me good, and you're a nice kind of man. I don't mind tellin' you."

"I saved up some money, and I bought up the Dead Soldier Mine in Spareribs, figurin' it would pay all right as soon as the Apaches was chased away. Well, they been chased, for a while, anyhow, so I packed up and come out to Spareribs to work it. Do you know Snakeweed?"

"I do."

"Well, he's settled in Spareribs. He's got Spareribs and he's got my mine. So he tells me, if I want to work it, I can marry him. Snakeweed!" Spud nodded. "There's limits to what a girl can take. So I'm headin' back. I tried to get out o' the corral, but I guess it's too high for me."

Spud studied her again. Young, definitely young under hard lines, bitterness, and dirt. Still a girl. He shifted uneasily. He'd made up his mind to his age, he was through with trouble. Still a girl, and wants to live nice.

She spoke again, relieving pain. "I figured there wouldn't be no one know me in Spareribs; I figured I could make a nice livin' off of that mine and by and by marry somebody. Yessir, that's what I figured. Only you couldn't marry Snakeweed, could you?"

"I never thought about him just that way, ma'am, but I guess not—no, he wouldn't hardly do."

"Well, I guess it's all right. I guess a girl like me ain't got no call tryin' to marry. It ain't on the cards."

"Don't you believe it, ma'am. Don't let 'em tell you that. Listen, I've been around some. I'm a quiet man, barrin' when I'm mad, but I didn't grow old settin' still. I've seen plenty. And some mighty fine wives come out of where you been." Spud paused. "Can you cook?"

"I can cook. I can make a flapjack the size o' the fryin' pan and so light you got to be careful breathin' or it'll blow away. I can make a lemon pie that if you're settin' out on the front porch, your mouth'll water when I take it out o' the oven. I can make beans you'd swear was strawberries."

Spud nodded. "Them's qualifications." He shifted in the saddle. Trouble again. Back at it. "Listen to me, ma'am. Don't you go to Tucson. About five mile down the trail you'll see a yaller mesa. You take the left fork, and by and by you go down into Alamos Canyon, and then you hit Alamos. It ain't much of a place, but it's all right. You go to the Bon Ton Hotel and Eatin' House—you can't miss it, it's nigh on to all there is—and ask for Hank Stromberg. Tell Hank I sent you and that you're to wait for me there. He'll take care o' you. He might give you a job waitin', if you wanted it. I'll take care o' Snakeweed."

"That's nice o' you, mister, but I don't think it'll work. I've read my cards. That's what they say."

Spud swung himself sideways and raised his right hand, shaking it once at her. "I'm Spud Flynn," he said. "I'm a half-blood Irish on my father's side and I come of a race o' kings; I know things more than what you just see. I know what's in the draw you ain't picked up yet, and I *ordain* that you wait for me at Hank's."

That was a good word, ordain, he thought, and wondered where he got it from.

The expression of her face changed slightly, became less hard. "But you can't handle Snakeweed. No offense, Mr. Flynn, but he's

tough. It calls for an awful big man to get Snakeweed. You might get hurt."

"It ain't just size. I'll tell you, Miss—"

"Hartshorn, Elvira Hartshorn."

"Thank you, Miss Hartshorn. Well, this'll make it clear to you. I was in an awful hurry once. I'd rode my horse down and I was pushin' along on foot with reason to get further. I struck a dry wash, too wide to jump, too steep to climb down. I was stuck. This was up in the Black Hills. And an eagle come by, and I roped him. He kept a-swingin' back and forth, tryin' to get loose, and when he was swingin' good, I jumped with him and we went acrost. It cost me a good maguey rope, but it worked fine. Well, that's what I mean. A heavier man couldn't ha' done it. It ain't all size. Nor I ain't fixin' to get myself hurt none."

"I guess you know yourself. I sure appreciate your tryin', Mr. Flynn."

"You can expect me in about—well—a week from tomorrow."

"Thursday week?"

"Thursday? You shore keep track. I kind o' thought it was Monday, but I hadn't really noticed. Thursday week, then."

She rose and they shook hands. "I'm pleased to have met you, Miss Hartshorn."

"I'm pleased to know you, Mr. Flynn. Wait a minute; I got something for you. It ain't much, but it's—well—something to show I appreciate what you're doin'."

From her saddle bags she took two peculiar flat, blue bottles. Spud's eyes widened.

"Take them along," she said, "they might be handy, or comfortin'."

Spud knew the form of those bottles from dim memory. Four-Eye Monongahela, liquor so good even barkeeps can't help drinking it, so rare that only twice in his life had he ever tasted it. Two bottles! Just thinking about them, he felt the springs of his old youth welling inside him. It's so long since I really been drunk, he thought, drunk like a hero.

"Thank you kindly, Miss Hartshorn," he said, lifting his hat. "Well, I'll be seein' you Thursday week. *Hasta la vista.*"

"Take care o' yourself."

The roan raised its head, awoke, felt injured, knew the spurs and returned to its fast, somnambulistic walk. The dust rose around them again, the little rocks and changes of kinds of sand and ineffectual cactus growths slid by, dropped behind. A man needs a hatbrim under his chin, Spud thought, feeling the heat strike upward from the desert. Saves shavin'; all my whiskers is sizzled off.

And I'm through with gettin' drunk like a hero. Hell, ain't I made up my mind to my age? The ageless men is long gone; Pa allus said so. Flynn or no Flynn, my youth is gone. And now I'm in for it. Snakeweed. Well, it's worth it if he could be took away. He shore spoils the climate where he's at.

II

The sun continued its travel at right angles to Spud's course, swung low, and poured under his hatbrim directly on his face. A clump of green, so emphatic in contrast that it appeared black, showed beyond a gray butte. Rounding the butte, Spud came into sight of a flat at the edge of which eight cottonwoods grew. Around them, craving the sight of their leaves, a handful of adobe houses and shacks of gray, dust-scoured boards were huddled, with a periphery of haphazard corrals. This was Spareribs, a place where you stopped on your way to somewhere else. But here, at least, there was a rest for man and beast, food cooked by someone else, and a corral to find your horse in in the morning. He rolled a cigarette as he drew nearer the settlement. He had the Four-Eye, too. That had to have a purpose, but he hadn't figured it out yet. There was a special place where it would come in; it might be for the purpose of alleviating Spareribs.

The sun had almost set when he stopped at the Rafter Lazy J corral. The boss came out, said, "Hello, Spud," and gave him the key to the hay room. Spud unsaddled, pulled out hay, filled the

nose bag with oats and put it on the roan. Then he washed lavishly at the trough. The feeling of being coated with dust and dried-out sweat went away. He squatted on his heels, smoking, his spurs just touching his backside, waiting for the roan to finish his nose bag. The sun was down, the air ceased to burn and became caressing. He blew smoke four ways. This was a daily pause, a time of complete relaxation between the day itself and whatever the night might bring; he'd think about Snakeweed later.

When the animal had turned to its hay, he went slowly, lazily, down the dusty, half-formed street to the Gold Mine Saloon and Eating Parlor and turned into it. There was a long, pine bar with a moderate equipment of bottles and two large, imperfect mirrors behind it. Along the other half of the room half a dozen tables were ranged. At the far end a gambler dealt against himself at a faro layout. Spud took him in—dressed in the usual black, with a diamond in his tie and another on his left hand, but shabby and thin. You could size up the town from him. The barkeep looked like a barkeep; they almost always do.

Spud went to the bar and said, "Howdy."

"Howdy, stranger. What's your pleasure?"

"My pleasure's far from here." Spud jerked his head toward a bottle. "I'll take a shot o' red-eye, please."

"Help yourself." The barkeep passed him a bottle and glass.

"Can I get fed here?"

"We got steak and beans."

"I'll take steak. And another o' these."

"Help yourself."

The barkeep shouted through a little door, and pretty soon a Chinaman came out and laid the table. Spud ambled over and sat down. Four kinds of sauce in the bottles—long ago, this must have been a good restaurant. The Chinaman brought thin coffee, hot bread, a little bowl of canned peas, another of greengages. Minutes later he brought the steak. Spud ate steadily, industriously, without haste. Two X Circle X cowboys came in, then three Mexicans, drifting to the bar. By and by they went over to the faro layout. Spud could tell they were making about ten-cent bets.

There was a disturbance at the door, and Spud looked around. It was not exactly that there was any noise, only as the man entered, one was aware of it. Spud sighed. Here's Snakeweed, he thought, now things are going to commence. He finished his greengages and walked to the bar.

"Hello, Snakeweed."

"Spud Flynn! Why, hello, Spud."

"How about a little nosepaint?"

"Suits me."

"Barkeep, a couple o' fingers o' tanglefoot."

The barkeep set them out. They poured, raised glasses.

"Howl!"

"Howl!"

They drank. Snakeweed said, "Hell, that stuff's so much milk. Doctor, give us some Tiger Bone."

Tiger Bone is a Chinese drink, distilled from tigers. It is all but black, and it is dreadful. It is the backwards of Four-Eye Monongahela. I knew it, Spud thought, I knew it. I'm in for it now.

The barkeep unearthed the long, strange bottle from a cupboard. He set the glasses out first and poured into them, not wanting a drop to fall on his hands and burn him. Snakeweed struck a match and lit his drink. Raising the flaming jigger, he said, "How."

Spud groaned internally. He lit his drink and answered. Snake-weed blew out as he drank, but Spud had almost forgotten, and he was worried about having his mustache burnt off, so he drew inward and gulped, thus getting the full benefit of it. He coughed, spat, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. Snakeweed just spat, without manners.

"That does it," the big man said.

Spud nodded. His pulse picked up, he felt the warmth, his perceptions became clearer. He saw that Snakeweed was a mite upset that he had been able to take the drink.

"I was hopin' to see you, Snakeweed," he said.

"Well, here I be. It's a pleasure to see you, Spud."

"I was fixin' to talk to you about a little matter."

"This is the best place in the world for it. Let her rip."

"Well, it's about a lady called Elvira Hartshorn."

"Elviry? Nice girl. She's a good cook, Spud. I'm fixin' to marry her."

"Seem-so she ain't fixin' to marry you."

"Maybe not right now, but she's a-goin' to, and pronto." Snakeweed paused and eyed Spud. "You know me. I'm Snake-weed; that's what they call me and they better like it."

Spud nodded again. That was Snakeweed's war-talk, that last statement. And he realized suddenly that he'd made his own, back there with Miss Hartshorn—Spud Flynn, come of a race o' kings. The Tiger Bone was burning in his vitals.

"I don't want for Miss Hartshorn to marry out of her own free choice," he said. "It don't seem right."

"Them's shore nice sentiments, Spud. But my marryin' ain't something I'm takin' anybody else's advice on."

"Maybe you're goin' to get it all the same." Spud's hands moved a fraction of an inch.

Snakeweed raised a hairy paw. "Don't think of it, Spud. Don't let it pass through your mind. You know I'd only have to plug you to keep up my self-respect. They ain't but one bullet will kill me, and I got it." He patted his cartridge belt, where the green point of the malachite bullet stuck downward among the lead ones. "Hashki Nez made it to kill me with, and I took it from him. I took him by his two hands and pulled him apart like a boiled fowl. That's me, Snakeweed."

Spud nodded. "Well, I guess that's that. Barkeep, two more o' the same."

Spud's willingness to come back on the liquor cramped Snake-weed's complacency slightly, but he was still satisfied. Spud was thinking fast. He didn't kill me then—why not? Four-Eye won't fill him with human kindness, no more than Tiger Bone would make me mean. I might could get him drunk plain, and take the bullet.

Spud surveyed the man. He was hollow, they claimed he had a clockwork heart. You'd have to fill him up from the bottom. The

top of his head and his eyes were small, but to get to them—each foot would take a full quart, a barrel for each leg, and two for his stomach—one for his proper insides and one for what hung out over his belt. Then you'd have to fill up his chest and his arms, and finally his face. No, it couldn't be done, not by any one man. He didn't drink to get tight, but because his insides itched and the liquor was scratchy. Spud looked at the face, the span-wide, almost lipless mouth and single, wiry hairs sticking out a couple of inches all over. Before they got onto him, the Navajos admired Snakeweed because his mouth was full of corn. His middle two teeth were black, the next each way red, then yellow and blue, like Indian corn. Miss Hartshorn was right; all the cowboys and miners in Arizona all drunk together would still be better.

Spud drank his drink and sighed. "Well, I come a long ways. Guess I'll be turnin' in."

"Sorry to lose your company. It's a pleasure to drink with you."

"Tomorrow maybe. I'm kind o' tired."

"Growin' old, Spud?"

"I reckon. So long."

"So long."

Spud had half an idea to go over and lose some real money at faro; he'd dealt faro, he knew how that man felt, but he decided not to bother with it now. He stepped out into the soft, blue night, full of the smell seeping through from the bit of irrigated land beyond the cottonwoods. He felt at ease. He felt happier than he had since he sat on top of Polvadera Peak, two years ago, and decided that his youth had ended and from now on he was through with trouble. Not since then had his sinews moved as smoothly, his joints been as springy as they were now. At the corral, his horse rose with a surging effort and whickered for more hay. Spud threw some out to him.

He laid out his blanket and slicker, and reclining on them, his head against the saddle, looked at the stars and rolled a smoke. His hand fumbled toward his warbags, touched the bottles. Not yet. He lit up and began thinking. I ain't but jest started, but it looks like I got to get me some help. Snakeweed ain't immortal,

no more'n me. He's Snakeweed and I can like it, can I? There ain't room for the two of us in the Southwest, nor nowheres; if him and me fetch up in hell together, we're shore goin' to worry the devil. Now let's see . . .

He ran his mind back along his memory, like a man loping his horse along a back trail watching for something he let fall. Through years of days he traveled back, watching the sun and moon and darkness, the horizons and water holes and alkali flats of his time. He stopped at himself sitting in a narrow canyon with his gun in one hand and his rope in the other, at midday. His saddle and bridle were piled at one side. The horse-hair rope lay on the ground before him, about ten feet of it from his hand to where it had been cut, and he was staring down the canyon at his horse, a fine big bay, running all out, and one foot and one hand of an Apache showing, the rest of the Indian hidden where he clung on the horse's further side. He was staring open-mouthed, helpless, with his gun in his hand. The cigarette he had given the Apache still lay burning on the ground where he had stood.

That feller was about seventeen ten years ago; he's the thief o' the world if he's alive now. He rolled the thought over in his mind, testing it, making sure that he knew this was it. Yep, I reckon I got to get holt o' Cochise. He looked at the stars. Late, that had taken half the night. He rolled up in his blanket and slept.

III

Well before dawn, he stuck the key and a dollar under the corral owner's door, saddled up and lit out. Four days, he figured, Indian business is always four days, I got to get goin'. He rode at a good trot, upward along a ridge, and so by sunrise had climbed to an outstanding foothill. Here he found enough brush to make, first, a good fire, then an evil-smelling smoke. The pillar went up, straight, high and thick. He threw on tobacco, four times, and two kinds of pollen from his medicine bag, and then in the column of smoke he placed a tuft of down from an eagle feather. The

down rose, up and beyond sight; the high top of the column bent to an off-earth, favoring wind, straightened again. Toward the southwest, Spud noted, all right, but nasty traveling. He slapped the roan on the rump.

"Hop along, Sister Mary, hop along."

The first day was like the second, the second was like the third, the third like the fourth, and the fourth like first until noon. At that hour he came to a single piñon in a cleft of rock. The rock was so hot that it would burn a man's backside if he sat on it, and him wearing thin cotton overalls all but worn through, but the piñon made a ball of shade, a break, a change in starved, desert monotony. This tree bein' here is unreasonable, he figured, I guess I'll stop. All around was gray-white and yellow-white desert, with a thin, greenish wash over it of scattered cactus and yucca. One buzzard hung overhead. He unsaddled, and tethered the roan, otherwise the animal would have made a break for food and water. He lit a cigarette and blew smoke four ways.

"Here I be," he said.

The rock was a trifle higher than the surrounding country. Right smack in the middle of a God damn fryin' pan, sittin' on top of a hot button. This is a hell of a place to choose. I always heard Cochise was ornery.

He stiffened to attention, sending his thought out in the Apaches' own way. They were coming. Nothing could be seen, no change anywhere, but in a wide circle east and south of him motion existed, approached. He took the two bottles out of his warbags. They were close, eyes and thoughts were upon him. He blew smoke four ways again. They stood up, a hundred men or more, lean, stringy, hollow-stomached, hard. Their hair hung straight, black and disorderly down their shoulders; on their naked backs, chests and thighs the dust had set in the sweat. Their quiet faces were full of ready war. One of them walked up to him. He had a single feather in his hair, and carried a rifle. The slender barrel with the bluing worn off and the hammer well used but in perfect condition, the scarred stock, the bit of turquoise tied to the trigger guard, the readiness and steadiness with which he

carried it, as though it had been born with him, the unindicated but inescapable relationship latent between its front sight and Spud contained the essence of the man, of all these warriors. Spud felt satisfied. In a mixture of bad Spanish and bad Apache he asked, "Where's Cochise?"

"Who knows?" The man stopped about five yards from him.

"I am looking for Cochise, and he knows it."

"I am chief here."

"No you ain't."

"Cochise is not going to talk to you, Amelicano."

Spud stirred slightly. "I am Spud Flynn, and I come of a race o' kings. I am here. Tell Cochise to come to me."

The watching Indians stirred, the headman stepped back. From behind their ranks a man made himself visible, approached. He stood seven feet high, a broad, strong man but not heavy; hard like the others. His big, sun-blackened face loomed like the head of a mountain, full of power. He had a shield and spear slung on his back, and carried an eagle feather fan in his right hand. He walked up to Spud and looked him over. For some time they watched each other, both thinking, both putting forth what they had. It was clear to them that they did not need an interpreter.

"I saw your smoke," Cochise said.

"I have something here," Spud answered.

"The Four-Eye," Cochise looked at the bottles. "Good. I take them."

"Maybe-so, maybe not."

"How?"

"I did not ride all this way to make you a present."

"One never does." Cochise sat down.

"There's something's got to be done. I'm thinkin' about something."

"My thought is ready to listen."

"Do you know Snakeweed?"

"Of course. There is too much of him."

"He needs to be removed."

"Remove him."

"Help me."

Cochise spat. "He is bad for us, but he is worse for white men, I think. Why should I remove him? I am fighting your people, I am holding my country for my Apaches. If he kills you, if you kill him, if you both die, we are pleased."

"He's plumb bad. He ain't just bad for you or me, or for everyone; he's badness. True Chiefs, no matter who they be, can't sit and let him go on."

"True Chiefs? Do you think you are one, white man? I have come, I have met you, I have heard you. I shall now take the liquor."

"I'm Spud Flynn, and I come of a race o' kings. The liquor is not yet yours."

Spud uncorked a bottle. The smell arose and spread outward, the Apaches swayed toward it, Cochise ran his tongue over his lips, Spud's mouth watered. He put the cork back.

Cochise said, "*Njoni*. We shall see."

Sitting cross-legged there in front of Spud, he pulled himself in, concentrating himself. His outer borders did not disappear, there remained the space which he occupied, but the essence of his huge frame, his sky-blocking shoulders, centered within his mind, between his eyes. He pulled in his power until it was more than pent lightning, and though he still looked at Spud, he was not noticing him. He was paying attention to that which he intended to do. The Apaches took cover.

The sun overhead stopped, waited, reluctantly crept back. Spud saw the shadow under which he sat swing westward, away from him. The sun was forced down its own trail into morning, it descended, hung above the eastern mesas. Time trembled. It was clear, he knew and Cochise was telling him, the fear over the hiding Indians proclaimed it, that if the sun went down backwards the past would come again, and no man could stand it. The earth was plunging like a horse being backed and fighting the bit, in a minute the earth would start bucking. Spud thought that Cochise had the thighs to ride it, but he knew he hadn't. His

mouth was dry and he was sweating. In a minute he'd have to ask him to stop. Then he saw that Cochise was watching him. He got a grip on himself and cleared his throat. Immediately, from old habit automatically, he looked for a target, aimed, spat, and knocked a lizard endwise. He nodded satisfaction, and returned his eyes to Cochise's again.

Slowly, carefully, the Chief set the sun back in its proper place. The shadow of the tree swung round, the earth quieted, the Indians sat up. Cochise filled himself again. His forehead was wet from the effort he had made.

"That is power," he said, reaching for the bottle.

"Wait!"

Spud spoke sharply. He had been scared, he was mad, and he aimed to be madder. He began swearing, soft and mild at first, as his custom was, then as his wrath stood up in him, he got into the swing of his language and the air before his face changed color. He used the deep cussing of seamen, the low, venomous cussing of cattlemen, the freighters' whiplike oaths, and what he heard from the Mississippi roustabouts when he was a kid at home. He cussed the cussing of Mexican muleteers when they're feeling fine and want to tell the world, and when, at the end of a long, desert day, a mule falls and spills its pack, and another mule steps on their feet. He used the dreadful, whining cussing with which Finn sailors can stop or start a storm, and his father's terrible Irish wrath, and Navajo and Apache and Ute words of shriveling strength, and coureur de bois talk, and Kit Carson's main oath on top of the lot, and all along through it he wove in and out the ideas that came to him, the voice of his anger pouring itself out full. The warriors ducked, raised their shields and touched their medicine bags. Cochise put his fan before his face, and twice he half raised his hand to ask Spud to stop. As the cowpuncher's voice died away at last, there was a thump on the ground between them, and the buzzard which had been sailing high above fell to earth, scorched clean of feathers.

Spud drew a breath. Cochise waved his eagle fan again. He was

chagrined. He had performed his showiest magic first and overplayed his hand.

Spud said, "What you done is ornamental, but it don't serve no purpose. The sun always has to be put back. But this o' mine, now, it's reliev'in' to the feelin's. My throat's terrible dry. I reckon I'll take a drink."

Cochise made a negative gesture with his hand. He drew his knife slowly, and turning slightly to his left, reached upward. With the point against the blue of the upper sky he cut, the blade moving steadily through mild resistance, like cutting cheese. The four strokes made an irregular diamond. With his left hand he pulled that cut piece out of the sky, then he settled back and turned his gaze upon Spud.

Spud looked at the hole, and he couldn't stop looking. He had not known there was a blue like that, he didn't hardly believe any color could be so wonderful. The blue was transparent, letting through into more blueness, into endless depth. Behind the sky, through that hole, something was about to be seen. All happiness and contentment were waiting there. His soul went up toward it he leaned forward, rapt, staring. There was nothing in the world that mattered if this could be attained. The desire of his innermost heart was about to make itself known. He would rise up and go to it, through the hole in the sky. The world was mean and small; this was everything. Sweet peace filled him. There was a date next Thursday—did it matter? Here was the end, after all. A promise made. But satisfaction, happiness, showed their full meaning to him. Who am I? he thought. It don't matter. I don't have to go on bein' Spud. His body had no weight, his whole being floated deliciously. A word of a kingly line whispered in his memory, a promise made. With an effort, he put his hand over his eyes. I'm Spud Flynn, and I come of a race o' kings. Snakeweed. He shook himself, opened his eyes and looked at Cochise.

"That was strong," he said. He still felt wistful.

Cochise put the piece back and sheathed his knife. He reached for the bottle.

"That was strong," Spud repeated, "but you didn't dast look at it yourself."

"What can you watch that I cannot?"

"Looky here."

He pulled a long piece of fine string out of his pocket.

"I was a sailor oncet," he said, and began knotting.

While his fingers worked, he whistled "Whisky Johnny" through his teeth making a sound like wind in ropes, monotonous, repetitious, dolorous. The string moved, turned back upon itself, a fast plaiting with manifold knots. A web grew rapidly, strong, netlike, with a curious pattern in it. The whistling and the work continued. Cochise leaned closer, he was hardly breathing and his muscles bulged with effort. At length he put his hand out, covering the sennit.

"Untie it," he said in a choked voice.

Spud pulled one end, the whole thing came out straight with a little whizz. Cochise let out a sigh, moved his arms, swung himself from side to side, feeling his freedom again.

He looked straight at Spud and said in a low voice, "I was in there."

"Sure you was." Spud put the string away.

"Let us each have a little of that Four-Eye. There has been great work this afternoon."

"Suits me. Seems a shame to keep puttin' off a good thing."

Spud opened a bottle and passed it over. Cochise said "How!" and drank. Spud said "How!" and drank. The perfume of the Four-Eye Monongahela, its full flavor and its great strength pervaded them, filling them out, penetrating to their finger tips. They felt good will toward mankind, they were elevated, their powers increased and their minds clarified.

"I never had a whole bottle of this before," Spud said. "How!"

Cochise took it in his turn. "I did once, long ago, but I shared it with Mangas Coloradas. How!"

They were superior to the world, but they desired it to be a better place, and they felt able to make it so. Spud's eye fell on the

singed buzzard lying between them in its horrible nakedness.

"They ain't pretty even when they're alive," he said, "but this, like it is now—well, it don't remind me of a chicken dinner."

"Let us improve it," Cochise said.

He passed his fan over the bird, and blew upon it. It was clothed again in its rusty black feathers. With an awful squawk it rose from the earth.

"You're plumb full o' magic," Spud said. "What I got's skill."

He pulled his two guns and fired each, twice. The bird came down again, stunned, two leaden bullets fused into shackles around its feet, two more in a collar around its neck.

"How's that?"

Cochise said, "Give the bird a drink, he deserves it."

Spud poured some of the liquor down its beak.

"What the hell's goin' on here?" the buzzard said. "You two can show off plenty power without misusin' me this way. Gimme some more o' that liquor and turn me loose."

"I reckon you've had plenty," Spud said.

"You do what I say, Spud Flynn. I know all about you. I know where you stole that roan you're goin' around on. And you, you big Apache you, I know where your life medicine's hidden, I do. You turn me loose and gimme another drink."

They said together, "You know too much." One reached for his gun, the other for his knife.

"Oh no you don't," the buzzard said. "I ain't the only one. What in hell do you think we do to pass the time up there, waitin' for our meals? You kill me, and I got plenty brothers to attend to you. The both of you."

"Free him," Cochise said.

Spud freed the bird and gave it another drink. "So long," it said, and flew upward unsteadily, emitting curious harsh sounds.

"It thinks it's a meadow lark," Spud said. "That's good liquor." He paused as an idea struck him. "Say, how did that bird get started talkin'? Did you do that?"

Cochise smiled faintly.

The sun was getting low. Cochise spoke to his men and fires were made, cooking started. An Indian brought a pile of small herbs, such as white men do not even see, for the roan, and a fire was built between the two men, but no one offended them with an offer of food. They smoked together ceremonially, contemplating the intimate, man-centered flame and the wide, universal sunset. Night followed close; when they sat enclosed within a sphere of low firelight, Spud passed the bottle. They smoked again.

Cochise said, "Now let us consider Snakeweed. My thought is upon him."

"For many reasons, any one o' which would be plenty, I've got to attend to him. I've made my war-boast and so has he."

"Good then. We have warriors here. Let us start."

"No, we can't do it that way. Snakeweed, he's got power, too. I jest want a little help to get around it."

Cigarettes were finished before Cochise replied. "I am holding my power here in the Apache country, I need it for my people. We win our battles, but we are few and hard pressed. One can win and win and lose in the end by going beyond one's strength. My power is here, for my people. I am afraid of letting my power leak out in a white man's affair, lest once it starts it all might run out. But you are right about Snakeweed, and Chiefs must help each other. What do you wish?"

Spud said gravely, "I don't reckon this'll wear out your medicine none. You know that malachite bullet he's got, the only one that will kill him?"

"Yes, Hashki Nez made it, but the Navajos talk too much. It was too bad."

"Well, I reckon there's a man o' yours can steal it for me. I'll tend to the rest."

"What man?"

"Feller who stole a big horse from me."

"We have stolen many horses, of all kinds and colors."

"Well, he was about seventeen years old, this Indian. I had the horse on a rope and my gun in my hand, and I was watchin' him,

and it was midday. That was ten years ago. I figured if he's still alive he ought to be the thief o' the world by now."

Cochise smiled. "He is here. You are right." He spoke toward the surrounding fires.

A slender man of medium height came into the light. He was ordinary in every way, save for the fluid quietness of his movements. Cochise told him to sit down.

"This is he."

"And he's gone on stealing?"

"Look at the bottle."

Spud took it up. There was a drink less in it than there had been a moment ago. Its stimulation showed on the Thief's face.

"All right. He'll do."

They explained the matter. The man looked pleased.

"That will be good to do. It will be a credit to me. For a long time I have done just ordinary stealing; my people say to me, 'Thief, where is your skill?' It is good."

They gave him another drink, searched him, and took both bottles back. Cochise told him to return to his own fire.

It would take a book to tell what Cochise and Spud discussed as the stars moved westward and the bottle was emptied, as stars crossed over and they went into the second bottle. They talked far, wide, high and deep. Under the influence of the Four-Eye Monongahela they reached out and embraced mankind, understanding, pitying, loving. They touched on the past and the future, and poured wisdoms and vision back and forth into each other. It was a great night, a great talk.

Near dawn the Thief joined them to finish the second bottle. Cochise gave the horses four kinds of pollen, life, breath and a feather, and the Thief and Spud mounted. They could have run to Spareribs in a few hours, the way they were then, but being proud men it suited them to ride.

At first light Spud and the Chief touched hands.

"When you have time," Cochise said, "light your fire again and send a feather. Do it for no reason."

"I'll do that."

IV

Spud and the Thief loped all that day and all the next night, at dawn reaching the ridge above Spareribs, and they took shelter in a mesquite grove. There they lay till the town awoke, and at last, after the sun was high and the air hot and dusty, Snakeweed came out of his shack. The Apache smiled.

"In his cartridge belt," Spud said.

"Do you want the whole belt?"

"Just the bullet."

"Good."

The Indian moved like smoke down the slope of the ridge. Near a stone he bent, pulled himself into himself, disappeared. Spud rolled over and went to sleep.

When he woke, well after noon, his first thought was, Golly, I hope I ain't slept it off. He sat up and considered himself. Reckon not. No. It ain't that kind o' drink. His joints moved supplely, his sinews were oiled, his thought danced as he considered life. Hell, I ain't old, he decided. What got into me? I ain't one that ages that-a-way. I'm back into it again. I'm Spud Flynn, I am, and by God I'm delighted.

He took it easy, smoking and thinking. Nice feller Cochise. Companionable when you got to know him. I'd kind o' like to look through that hole again, only I'd run a mile if he started to carve it out.

The Thief stood before him. "Here it is," he said.

Spud took the cartridge, staring at it. The malachite bullet's strong color glowed in the shade, it seemed to have life. One felt the magic that had been put into it.

"That's fine," he said. "Does he know he's lost it?"

"No." The Indian looked discontented. "I could have stolen him as well as not. And the place is full of good horses."

Spud nodded. "You'd like somethin' to take back with you, to show."

"Yes."

"Well, go ahead. The sky's the limit, jest so's you don't steal my roan or interfere with my play. I'll be through just after sundown, then go to it."

"Njoni." The Thief hesitated. "How about a Mexican girl?"

"No. That ain't nice. Don't you do it."

"Good. I shall take just horses."

"All right. And thanks. All men will know soon that you stole the bullet."

The Indian smiled. "That is good. I shall go further up and wait. *Adiós.*"

"*Adiós.*"

The bullet was set in a percussion-cap cartridge. Spud went delicately about putting it into one of his new center-fires, fearful of losing the medicine, but when he had done, he saw that it was all right. The bullet was full of certainty. As the sun went down, he rode into Spareribs and put his horse up again at the Rafter Lazy J corral.

I shore feel fine, he thought as he drifted along the street. His spurs clinked on his heels, he was at ease, full of peaceful excitement and life. I am Spud Flynn, and it suits me fine. He would not eat now, though he had cause to be hungry; the Four-Eye still worked smoothly in his system, and Indian medicine calls for empty stomachs. He was full of good will and readiness.

To pass the time, he went into the saloon and strolled up to the faro bank. The dealer greeted him with the same weary, professional show of warmth he used on hundreds of such dingy, threadbare cowboys. Spud looked over the layout and the deck. What he didn't know about faro didn't exist. He lost a dollar, then put up two dollars coppered and lost them. The dealer had been handling dimes for so long he had to stretch his fingers to pick up the cartwheels.

"Try again," he said. "The luck always changes."

"Thanks," Spud said. "I reckon that's sufficient."

He walked out again, feeling pleased. It was dark outside now, in starlight the frame houses and adobes were less achingly bare.

He made his way, leisurely, to the house with the broken front porch where Snakeweed lived. Looking through the window he could see the man gnawing at the roast hind leg of a bull beef. He stopped, picked a piece of gristle from between his teeth with a skinning knife, and went back to eating.

Spud felt just fine, he felt happy and that the world was right for him. Care was gone. Here was the beginning of pure pleasure. Standing a few yards away, he picked up a rock and hove it at the door. He heard Snakeweed move, and a chair fell over.

"What in hell?" called that harsh, roaring voice.

Spud loosened his gun in its holster.

"Come on out, Snakeweed you son of a bitch. Come on out and get it."

Biochemistry professor, top-level science-fiction writer for over twenty years, and *Fantasy and Science Fiction's* regular science columnist, The Good Doctor here tells a warm tale of youth and old age, of Madison Avenue and green grass, and of the power in a name.

Unto the Fourth Generation

by Isaac Asimov

At ten of noon, Sam Marten hitched his way out of the taxicab, trying as usual to open the door with one hand, hold his briefcase in another and reach for his wallet with a third. Having only two hands, he found it a difficult job and, again as usual, he thudded his knee against the cab-door and found himself still groping uselessly for his wallet when his feet touched pavement.

The traffic of Madison Avenue inched past. A red truck slowed its crawl reluctantly, then moved on with a rasp as the light changed. White script on its side informed an unresponsive world that its ownership was that of *F. Lewkowitz and Sons, Wholesale Clothiers*.

Levkovich, thought Marten with brief inconsequence, and finally fished out his wallet. He cast an eye on the meter as he clamped his briefcase under his arm. Dollar sixty-five, make that twenty cents more as a tip, two singles gone would leave him only one for emergencies, better break a fiver.

"Okay," he said, "take out one-eighty-five, bud."

"Thanks," said the cabbie with mechanical insincerity and made the change.

Marten crammed three singles into his wallet, put it away, lifted his briefcase and breasted the human currents on the sidewalk to reach the glass doors of the building.

Levkovich? he thought sharply, and stopped. A passerby glanced off his elbow.

"Sorry," muttered Marten, and made for the door again.

Levkovich? That wasn't what the sign on the truck had said.

The name had read Lewkowitz, Loo-koh-itz. Why did he *think* Levkovich? Even with his college German in the near past changing the w's to v's, where did he get the "-ich" from?

Levkovich? He shrugged the whole matter away roughly. Give it a chance and it would haunt him like a Hit Parade tinkle.

Concentrate on business. He was here for a luncheon appointment with this man, Naylor. He was here to turn a contract into an account and begin, at twenty-three, the smooth business rise which, as he planned it, would marry him to Elizabeth in two years and make him a paterfamilias in the suburbs in ten.

He entered the lobby with grim firmness and headed for the banks of elevators, his eye catching at the white-lettered directory as he passed.

It was a silly habit of his to want to catch suite numbers as he passed, without slowing, or (heaven forbid) coming to a full halt. With no break in his progress, he told himself, he could maintain the impression of belonging, of knowing his way around, and that was important to a man whose job involved dealing with other human beings.

Kulin-etts was what he wanted, and the word amused him. A firm specializing in the production of minor kitchen gadgets, striving manfully for a name that was significant, feminine, and coy, all at once—

His eyes snagged at the M's and moved upward as he walked. Mandel, Lusk, Lippert Publishing Company (two full floors), Lafkowitz, Kulin-etts. There it was—1024. Tenth floor. OK.

And then, after all, he came to a dead halt, turned in reluctant fascination, returned to the directory, and stared at it as though he were an out-of-towner.

Lafkowitz?

What kind of spelling was that?

It was clear enough. Lafkowitz, Henry J., 701. With an A. That was no good. That was useless.

Useless? Why useless? He gave his head one violent shake as though to clear it of mist. Damn it, what did he care how it was spelled? He turned away, frowning and angry, and hastened to an

elevator door, which closed just before he reached it, leaving him flustered.

Another door opened and he stepped in briskly. He tucked his briefcase under his arm and tried to look bright alive—junior executive in its finest sense. He had to make an impression on Alex Naylor, with whom so far he had communicated only by telephone. If he was going to brood about Lewkowitzes and Lafkowitzes—

The elevator slid noiselessly to a halt at seven. A youth in shirt-sleeves stepped off, balancing what looked like a desk-drawer in which were three containers of coffee and three sandwiches.

Then, just as the doors began closing, frosted glass with black lettering loomed before Marten's eyes. It read: 701—HENRY J. LEFKOWITZ—IMPORTER and was pinched off by the inexorable coming together of the elevator doors.

Marten leaned forward in excitement. It was his impulse to say: Take me back down to 7.

But there were others in the car. And after all, he had no reason.

Yet there was a tingle of excitement within him. The Directory *had* been wrong. It wasn't A, it was E. Some fool of a non-spelling manial with a packet of small letters to go on the board and only one hind foot to do it with.

Lefkowitz. Still not right, though.

Again, he shook his head. Twice. Not right for what?

The elevator stopped at ten and Marten got off.

Alex Naylor of Kulin-etts turned out to be a bluff, middle-aged man with a shock of white hair, a ruddy complexion, and a broad smile. His palms were dry and rough, and he shook hands with a considerable pressure, putting his left hand on Marten's shoulder in an earnest display of friendliness.

He said, "Be with you in two minutes. How about eating right here in the building? Excellent restaurant, and they've got a boy who makes a good martini. That sound all right?"

"Fine. Fine." Marten pumped up enthusiasm from a somehow-clogged reservoir.

It was nearer ten minutes than two, and Marten waited with the

usual uneasiness of a man in a strange office. He stared at the upholstery on the chairs and at the little cubby-hole within which a young and bored switchboard operator sat. He gazed at the pictures on the wall and even made a half-hearted attempt to glance through a trade journal on the table next to him.

What he did not do was think of Lev—

He did *not* think of it.

The restaurant was good, or it would have been good if Marten had been perfectly at ease. Fortunately, he was freed of the necessity of carrying the burden of the conversation. Naylor talked rapidly and loudly, glanced over the menu with a practiced eye, recommended the Eggs Benedict, and commented on the weather and the miserable traffic situation.

On occasion, Marten tried to snap out of it, to lose that edge of fuzzed absence of mind. But each time the restlessness would return. Something was wrong. The name was wrong. It stood in the way of what he had to do.

With main force, he tried to break through the madness. In sudden verbal clatter, he led the conversation into the subject of wiring. It was reckless of him. There was no proper foundation; the transition was too abrupt.

But the lunch had been a good one; the dessert was on its way; and Naylor responded nicely.

He admitted dissatisfaction with existing arrangements. Yes, he had been looking into Marten's firm and, actually, it seemed to him that, yes, there was a chance, a good chance, he thought, that—

A hand came down on Naylor's shoulder as a man passed behind his chair. "How's the boy, Alex?"

Naylor looked up, grin ready-made and flashing. "Hey, Lefk, how's business?"

"Can't complain. See you at the—" He faded into the distance.

Marten wasn't listening. He felt his knees trembling, as he half-rose. "Who was that man?" he asked, intensely. It sounded more peremptory than he intended.

"Who? Lefk? Jerry Lefkovitz. You know him?" Naylor stared with cool surprise at his lunch companion.

"No. How do you spell his name?"

"L-E-F-K-O-V-I-T-Z, I think. Why?"

"With a V?"

"An F . . . Oh, there's a V in it, too." Most of the good nature had left Naylor's face.

Marten drove on. "There's a Lefkowitz in the building. With a W. You know, Lef-COW-itz."

"Oh?"

"Room 701. This is not the same one?"

"Jerry doesn't work in this building. He's got a place across the street. I don't know this other one. This is a big building, you know. I don't keep tabs on every one in it. What is all this, anyway?"

Marten shook his head and sat back. He didn't know what all this was, anyway. Or at least, if he did, it was nothing he dared explain. Could he say: I'm being haunted by all manner of Lefkowitzes today.

He said, "We were talking about wiring."

Naylor said, "Yes. Well, as I said, I've been considering your company. I've got to talk it over with the production boys, you understand. I'll let you know."

"Sure," said Marten, infinitely depressed. Naylor wouldn't let him know. The whole thing was shot.

And yet, through and beyond his depression, there was still that restlessness.

The hell with Naylor. All Marten wanted was to break this up and get on with it. (*Get on with what?* But the question was only a whisper. Whatever did the questioning inside him was ebbing away, dying down . . .)

The lunch frayed to an ending. If they had greeted each other like long-separated friends at last reunited, they parted like strangers.

Marten felt only relief.

He left with pulses thudding, threading through the tables, out of the haunted building, onto the haunted street.

Haunted? Madison Avenue at 1:20 P.M. in an early fall afternoon with the sun shining brightly and ten thousand men and women be-hiving its long straight stretch.

But Marten felt the haunting. He tucked his briefcase under his arm and headed desperately northward. A last sigh of the normal within him warned him he had a three o'clock appointment on 36th Street. Never mind. He headed uptown. Northward.

At 54th Street, he crossed Madison and walked west, came abruptly to a halt and looked upward.

There was a sign on the window, three stories up. He could make it out clearly: A. S. LEFKOWICH, CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANT.

It had an F and an EW, but it was the first "-ich" ending he had seen. The first one. He was getting closer. He turned north again on Fifth Avenue, hurrying through the unreal streets of an unreal city, panting with the chase of something, while the crowds about him began to fade.

A sign in a ground floor window, M. R. LEFKOWICZ, M.D.

A small gold-leaf semi-circle of letters in a candy-store window: JACOB LEVKOW.

(Half a name, he thought savagely. Why is he disturbing me with half a name?)

The streets were empty now except for the varying clan of Lefkowitz, Levkowitz, Lefkowicz to stand out in the vacuum.

He was dimly aware of the park ahead, standing out in painted motionless green. He turned west. A piece of newspaper fluttered at the corner of his eyes, the only movement in a dead world. He veered, stooped, and picked it up, without slackening his pace.

It was in Yiddish, a torn half-page.

He couldn't read it. He couldn't make out the blurred Hebrew letters, and could not have read it if they were clear. But one word was clear. It stood out in dark letters in the center of the page, each letter clear in its every serif. And it said Lefkovitsch, he knew, and

as he said it to himself, he placed its accent on the second syllable: Lef-KUH-vich.

He let the paper flutter away and entered the empty park.

The trees were still and the leaves hung in odd, suspended attitudes. The sunlight was a dead weight upon him and gave no warmth.

He was running, but his feet kicked up no dust and a tuft of grass on which he placed his weight did not bend.

And there on a bench was an old man; the only man in the desolate park. He wore a dark felt hat, with a visor shading his eyes. From underneath it, tufts of gray hair protruded. His grizzled beard reached the uppermost button of his rough jacket. His old trousers were patched, and a strip of burlap was wrapped about each worn and shapeless shoe.

Marten stopped. It was difficult to breathe. He could only say one word and he used it to ask his question: "Levkovich?"

He stood there, while the old man rose slowly to his feet; brown old eyes peering close.

"Marten," he sighed. "Samuel Marten. You have come." The words sounded with an effect of double exposure, for under the English, Marten heard the faint sigh of a foreign tongue. Under the "Samuel" was the unheard shadow of a "Schmu-el."

The old man's rough, veined hands reached out, then withdrew as though he were afraid to touch. "I have been looking but there are so many people in this wilderness of a city-that-is-to-come. So many Martins and Martines and Mortons and Mertons. I stopped at last when I found greenery, but for a moment only—I would not commit the sin of losing faith. And then you came."

"It is I," said Marten, and knew it was. "And you are Phinehas Levkovich. Why are we here?"

"I am Phinehas ben Jehudah, assigned the name Levkovich by the ukase of the Tsar that ordered family names for all. And we are here," the old man said, softly, "because I prayed. When I was already old, Leah, my only daughter, the child of my old age, left for America with her husband, left the knouts of the old for the

hope of the new. And my sons died, and Sarah, the wife of my bosom, was long dead and I was alone. And the time came when I, too, must die. But I had not seen Leah since her leaving for the far country and word had come but rarely. My soul yearned that I might see sons born unto her; sons of my seed; sons in whom my soul might yet live and not die."

His voice was steady and the soundless shadow of sound beneath his words was the stately roll of an ancient language.

"And I was answered and two hours were given me that I might see the first son of my line to be born in a new land and in a new time. My daughter's daughter's daughter's son, have I found you, then, amidst the splendor of this city?"

"But why the search? Why not have brought us together at once?"

"Because there is pleasure in the hope of the seeking, my son," said the old man, radiantly, "and in the delight of the finding. I was given two hours in which I might seek, two hours in which I might find . . . and behold, thou art here, and I have found that which I had not looked to see in life." His voice was old, caressing. "Is it well with thee, my son?"

"It is well, my father, now that I have found thee," said Marten, and dropped to his knees. "Give me thy blessing, my father, that it may be well with me all the days of my life, and with the maid whom I am to take to wife and the little ones yet to be born of my seed and thine."

He felt the old hand resting lightly on his head and there was only the soundless whisper.

Marten rose.

The old man's eyes gazed into his yearningly. Were they losing focus?

"I go to my fathers now in peace, my son," said the old man, and Marten was alone in the empty park.

There was an instant of renewing motion, of the Sun taking up its interrupted task, of the wind reviving, and even with that first instant of sensation, all slipped back—

At ten of noon, Sam Marten hitched his way out of the taxicab, and found himself groping uselessly for his wallet while traffic inched on.

A red truck slowed, then moved on. A white script on its side announced: *F. Lewkowitz and Sons, Wholesale Clothiers.*

Marten didn't see it.

One of *Fantasy and Science Fiction's* most popular series has been Zenna Henderson's stories about The People. So many readers have asked for a list of those stories that it seems sensible to include it here: "Ararat" (Oct. '52), "Gilead" (Aug. '54), "Pottage" (Sept. '55), "Wilderness" (Jan. '57), "Captivity" (June '58), and "Jordan," herewith. It is a memorable group.

Jordan

by Zenna Henderson

I guess I was the first to see it—the bright form among the clouds above Baldy. There seemed to be no interval of wondering or questioning in my mind. I knew the moment I caught the metallic gleam—the instant the curl-back of the clouds gave a brief glimpse of a long sleek curve. I knew and I gave a shout of delight. Here it was! What more direct answer to a prayer could any fellow want? Just like that! My release from rebellion, the long-awaited answer to my protests against restrictions! There above me was release! I emptied my two hands of the gravel I had made of two small rocks, during the time I had brooded on my boulder, dusted my palms against my levis and lifted myself above the brush. I turned towards home, the tops of the underbrush ticking off the distance against my trailing toes. But oddly I felt a brief, remote pang—almost of . . . regret?

As I neared the Canyon, I heard the cry, and saw one after another of the Group shoot upwards towards Baldy. I forgot that momentary pang and shot upwards with the rest of them. And my hands were among the first to feel the tingly hot-and-cold sleekness of the ship that was cooling yet from the heat of entry into the atmosphere. It was only a matter of minutes before the hands of the whole Group from the Canyon bore the ship downwards from the clouds to the haven of the pine flats beyond Cougar—bore it rejoicing, singing an almost forgotten welcome song of The People.

Still tingling to the Song, I rushed to Obla's house, bringing, as always, any new event to her, since she could come to none.

"Obla! Obla!" I cried as I slammed in through her door. "They've come! They've come! They're here! Someone from the New Home—" Then I remembered, and I Went In to her mind. The excitement so filled my own mind that I didn't even have to verbalize for her before she caught the sight. Through my wordlessly sputtering delight, I caught her faint chuckle. "Bram, the ship couldn't have rainbows around it and be diamond studded from end to end!"

I laughed too, a little abashed. "No, I guess not," I thought back at her. "But it should have a halo on it!"

Then for the next while I sat in the quiet room and relived every second of the event for Obla—the sights, the sounds, the smells, the feel of everything, including a detailed description of the—haloless—ship. And Obla, deaf, blind, voiceless, armless, legless, Obla who would horrify most any outsider, lived the whole event with me, questioned me minutely, and finally lifted her unheard voice with the rest of us in the song of Welcome.

"Obla." I moved closer to her and looked down at the quiet, scarred face, framed in the abundance of dark, vigorous hair. "Obla, it means The Home, the real Home. And for you—"

"And for me—" Her lips tightened and her eyelids flattened. Then the curtain of her hair swirled across her face as she hid herself from my eyes. "Perhaps a kinder world to hide this hideous—"

"Not hideous!" I cried indignantly.

Her soft chuckle tickled my mind. "Well, *not*, anyway," she said. "You'll have to admit that the explosion didn't leave much of me—" Her hair flowed back from her face and spread across the pillow.

"The part of you that counts!" I exclaimed.

"On Earth you need a physical container," she said. "One that functions. And just once, I wish that—" Her mind blanked before I could catch her wish. The glass of water lifted from the bedside

stand and hovered at her mouth. She drank briefly. The glass slid back to its place.

"So you're all afire to blast off?" her thought teased. "Back to civilization! Farewell to the rugged frontier!"

"Yes, I am," I said defiantly. "You know how I feel. It's criminal to waste lives like ours. If we can't live to capacity here, let's go Home!"

"To which Home?" She questioned. "The one we knew is gone. What is the new one like?"

"Well," I hesitated. "I don't know. We haven't communicated yet. But it must be almost like the old Home. At least it's probably inhabited by The People, our People."

"Are you so sure we're still the same People?" persisted Obla, "Or that they are? Time and distance can change—"

"Of course we're the same," I cried. "That's like asking if a dog is a dog in the Canyon just because he was born in Socorro."

"I had a dog once," said Obla. "A long time ago. He thought he was people because he'd never been around other dogs. It took him six months to learn to bark. It came as quite a blow to him when he found out he was a dog."

"If you mean we've deteriorated since we came—"

"You chose the dog, not I," she said. "Let's not quarrel. Besides, I didn't say that *we* were the dog."

"Yeah, but—"

"Yeah, but—" she echoed, amused, and I laughed.

"Darn you, Obla, that's the way most of my arguments with you end—yeah-but, yeah-but!"

"Why don't they come out?" I rapped impatiently against the vast seamless bulk, shadowy above me in the night. "What's the delay?"

"You're being a child, Bram," said Jammy. "They have their reasons for waiting. Remember this is a strange world to them. They must be sure—"

"Sure!" I gestured impatiently. "We've *told* them the air's okay and there's no viruses waiting to snap them off. Besides, they have

their personal shields. They don't even have to *touch* this earth if they don't want to. Why don't they come out?"

"Bram." I recognized the tone of Jemmy's voice.

"Oh, I know, I know," I said. "Impatience, impatience. Everything in its own good time. But now, Jemmy, now that they're here, you and Valancy will have to give in. They'll make you see that the thing for us People to do is to get out completely or else get in there with the Outsiders and clean up this mess of a world. With this new help we could do it easily. We could take over key positions—"

"No matter how many have come—and we don't know yet how many there are," said Jemmy. "This 'taking over' isn't the way of the People. Things must grow. You only graft in extreme cases. And destroy practically never.

"But let's not get involved in all that again now. Valancy—"

Valancy slanted down, the stars behind her, from above the ship. "Jemmy." Their hands brushed as her feet reached the ground. There it was again. That wordless flame of joy, that completeness as they met, after a long ten minutes separation. *That* made me impatient, too. I never felt that kind of oneness with anyone.

I heard Valancy's little laugh. "Oh Bram," she said. "Do you have to have your whole dinner in one gulp? Can't you be content to wait for anything?"

"It might be a good idea for you to do a little concentrated thinking," said Jemmy. "They won't be coming out until in the morning. You stay here on guard tonight—"

"On guard against what?" I asked.

"Against impatience," said Jemmy, his voice taking on the Old One tone that expected obedience without having to demand it. Amusement had crept back into his voice before his next sentence. "For the good of your soul, Bram, and the contemplation of your sins, keep watch this whole night. I have a couple of blankets in the pick-up." He gestured and the blankets drifted through the scrub oak. "There, that'll hold you till morning."

I watched the two of them meet with the pick-up truck above the thin trickle of the creek. Valancy called back. "Thinking *might* help, Bram. You should try it."

A startled night bird flapped dismally ahead of them for a while and then the darkness took them all.

I spread the blankets on the sand by the ship, leaning against the smooth coolness of its outer skin, marveling anew at its seamlessness, its unbroken flow the full length. Somewhere there had to be an exit, but right now the evening light ran uninterrupted from glowing end to glowing end.

Who was in there? How many were in there? A ship of this size could carry hundreds. Their communicator and ours had spoken briefly together, ours stumbling a little with words we remembered of the Home tongue that seemed to have changed or fallen out of use, but no mention of numbers was made before the final thought: "We are tired. It's a long journey. Thanks be to the Power, the Presence and the Name that we have found you. We will rest until morning."

The drone of a high flying turbo-jet above the Canyon caught my ear. I glanced quickly up. Our un-light still humped itself up over the betraying shine of the ship. I relaxed on the blankets, wondering . . . wondering.

It was so long ago—back in my grandparents' day—that it all happened. The Home, smashed to a handful of glittering confetti—the People scattered to every compass point, looking for refuge. It was all in my memory, the stream of remembrance that ties the People so strongly together. If I let myself, I could suffer the loss, the wandering, the tedium and terror of the search for a new world. I could live again the shrieking incandescent entry into Earth's atmosphere, the heat, the vibration, the wrenching and shattering. And I could share the bereavement, the tears, the blinding, maiming agony of some of the survivors who made it to Earth. And I could hide and dodge and run and die with all who suffered the settlement period—trying to find the best way to fit in unnoticed among the people of Earth and yet not lose our identity as the People.

But this was all the past—though sometimes I wonder if anything is ever past. It is the future I'm impatient for. Why, look at the area of international relations alone. Valancy could sit at the table at the next summit conference and read the truth behind all the closed, wary, sparring faces—truth naked and blinding as the glint of the moon on the edge of a metal door . . . opening . . . opening . . .

I snatched myself to awareness. Someone was leaving the ship. I lifted a couple of inches off the sand and slid along quietly in the shadow. The figure came out, carefully, fearfully. The door swung shut and the figure straightened. Cautious step followed cautious step, then, in a sudden flurry of movement, the figure was running down the creek bed—fast! Fast! For about a hundred feet, and then it collapsed, face down onto the stand.

I streaked over and hovered. "Hi!" I said.

Convulsively the figure turned over and I was looking down into her face. I caught her name—Salla.

"Are you hurt?" I asked audibly.

"No," she thought. "No," she articulated with an effort. "I'm not used to—" she groped—"running." She sounded apologetic, not for being unused to running, but for running. She sat up and I sat down. We acquainted one another with our faces and I liked very much what I saw. It was a sort of restatement of Valancy's luminously pale skin and dark eyes and warm, lovely mouth. She turned away and I caught the faint glimmer of her personal shield.

"You don't need it," I said. "It's warm and pleasant tonight."

"But—" Again I caught the embarrassed apology.

"Oh surely not always!" I protested. "What a grim deal. Shields are only for emergencies!"

She hesitated a moment and then the glimmer died. I caught the faint fragrance of her and thought ruefully that if I had a—fragrance?—it was probably compounded of barnyard, lumber mill and supper hamburgers.

She drew a deep cautious breath. "Oh!" she cried. "Growing things! Life everywhere! We've been so long on the way. Smell it!"

Obligingly I did but was conscious only of a crushed manzanita smell from beneath the ship.

This is kind of an aside, because I can't stop in my story at every turn and try to explain. Outsiders, I suppose, have no parallel for the way Salla and I got acquainted. Under all the talk, under all the activity and busy-ness in the times that followed, was a deep underflow of communication between the two of us. Far under the need for audibility or for verbalization, questioning, answering, explaining, exploring. What was obvious to a bystander was the least of the communication between us. I had felt this same type of awareness before when our In-gathering brought new members of the Group to the Canyon, but never quite so strongly as with Salla. It must have been more noticeable because we lacked many of the common experiences that are shared by those who have occupied the same Earth together since birth. That must have been it.

"I remember," said Salla as she sifted sand through slender, unused-looking hands, "when I was very small I went out in the rain." She paused, as though for a reaction. "Without my shield," she amplified. Again the pause. "I got *wet!*" she cried, determined, apparently, to shock me.

"Last week," I said, "I walked in the rain and got so wet that my shoes squelched at every step and the clean taste of rain was in my mouth. It's one of my favorite pastimes . . . There's something so quiet about rain," I went on. "Even when there's wind and thunder, there's a stillness about it. I like it."

Then, shaken by hearing myself say such things aloud, I sifted sand too, a little violently at first.

She reached over with a slender, milky finger and touched my hand. "Brown," she said. Then "Tan," as she caught my thought.

"The sun," I said. "We're out in the sun so much, unshielded, that it browns our skins or freckles them, or burns the living daylight out of us if we're not careful."

"Then you still live in touch of Earth," she said. "At Home we seldom ever—" Her words faded and I caught a capsuled feeling that might have been real cozy if you were born to it, but—

"How come?" I asked. "What's with your world that you have to shield all the time?" I felt a pang for my pictured Eden . . .

"We don't *have* to," she said, "At least not any more— When we arrived at the New Home, we had to do a pretty thorough renovating job. We—of course this was my grandparent—wanted it as nearly like the Old Home as possible. We've done wonderfully well copying the vegetation and hills and valleys and streams, but—" Guilt tinged her words. "It's still a copy—nothing casual and . . . and thoughtless . . . By the time the New Home was livable, we'd got into the habit of shielding. It was just what one did automatically. I don't believe Mother has gone unshielded outside her own sleep-room in all her life. You just—don't—"

I sprawled my arm across the sand, feeling it grit against my skin. Real cozy . . . but—

She sighed. "One time—I was old enough to know better, they told me—one time I walked in the sun unshielded. I got muddy and got my hands dirty and tore my dress." She brought out the untidy words with an effort, as though using extreme slang at a very prim gathering. "And I tangled my hair so completely in a tree that I had to pull some of it out to get free." There was no bravado in her voice now. Now she was sharing with me one of the most precious of her memories—one not quite socially acceptable among her own.

I touched her hand lightly—since I do not communicate too freely without contact—and saw her.

She was stealing out of the house before dawn—strange house, strange landscape, strange world . . . easing the door shut, lifting quickly out into the grove below the house. Her flame of rebellion wasn't strange to me, though. I knew it too well myself. Then she dropped her shield. I gasped with her because I was feeling, as newly as though I were the First in a brand new Home, the movement of wind on my face, on my arms. I was even conscious of it streaming like tiny rivers between my fingers. I felt the soil beneath my hesitant feet, the soft packed clay, the outline of a leaf, the harsh stab of gravel, the granular sandiness of the

water's edge. The splash of water against my legs was as sharp as a bite into lemon. And wetness! I had no idea that wetness was such an individual feeling. I can't remember when first I waded in water, or whether I ever felt wetness to know consciously, "This is wetness." The newness! It was like nothing I'd felt before.

Then suddenly there was the smell of crushed manzanita again and Salla's hand had moved from beneath mine.

"Mother's Questing for me," she whispered. "She has no idea I'm out here. She'd have a Quanic if she knew. I must go before she gets no answer from my room."

"When are you all coming out?" I asked.

"Tomorrow, I think," she said. "Laam will have to rest longer. He's our motiver, you know. It was exhausting bringing the ship into the atmosphere. More so than the whole rest of the trip. But the rest of us—"

"How many?" I whispered as she glided away from me and up the curve of the ship.

"Oh," she whispered back. "There's—" The door opened and she slid inside and it closed.

"Dream sweetly," I heard soundlessly, then astonishingly, the touch of a soft cheek against one of my cheeks, and the warm movement of lips against the other. I was startled and confused, though pleased, until with a laugh I realized that I had been caught between the mother's Questing and Salla's reply.

"Dream sweetly," I thought, and rolled myself in my blankets.

Something wakened me in the empty hours before dawn. I lay there feeling snatched out of sleep like a fish out of water, shivering in the interval between putting off sleep and putting on awakesness.

"I'm supposed to think," I thought dully. "Concentrated thinking."

So I thought. I thought of my People, biding their time, biding their time, waiting, waiting, walking when they could be flying. Think, *Think* what we could do if we stopped waiting and really

got going. Think of Bethie, our Sensitive, in a medical center, reading the illnesses and ailments to the doctors. No more chance for patients to hide behind imaginary illnesses. No wrong diagnoses, no delay in identification of conditions. Of course there's only one Bethie and the few Sorters we have who could serve a little less effectively, but it would be a beginning.

Think of our Sorters, helping to straighten people out, able to search their deepest beings and pry the scabs off ancient cankers and wounds and let healing into the suffering intricacies of the mind.

Think of our ability to lift, to transport, to communicate, to *use* Earth instead of submitting to it. Hadn't Man been given dominion over Earth? Hadn't he forfeited it somewhere along the way? Couldn't we help point him back to the path again?

I twisted with this concentrated restatement of all my questions. Why couldn't this all be so now, *now*!

But "No," say the Old Ones. "Wait," says Jemmy. "Not now," says Valancy.

"But look!" I wanted to yell. "They're headed for space! Trying to get there on a pogo stick. Look at Laam! He brought that ship to us from some far Homeland without lifting his hand, without gadgets in his comfortable motive-room. Take any of us. I, myself, could lift our pick-up high enough to need my shield to keep me breathing. I'll bet even I in one of those sealed, high flying planes could take it to the verge of space, just this side of the escape rim. And any motiver could take it over the rim and the hard part is over. Of course, though all of us can lift, we have only two motivers, but it would be a start!"

But "No," say the Old Ones. "Wait," says Jemmy, "Not now," says Valancy.

All right, so it would be doing violence to the scheme of things, grafting a third arm onto an organism designed for two. So the Earth ones will develop along our line some day—look at Peter and Dita and that Francher kid and Bethie. So someday when it is earned, they will have it. So—let's go, then! Let's find another

Home. Let's take to space and leave them their Earth. Let's let them have their time—if they don't die of it first. Let's leave. Let's get out of this crumby joint. Let's go somewhere where we can be ourselves all the time, openly, unashamed!

I pounded my fists on the blanket, then ruefully wiped the flecks of sand from my lips and tongue and grunted a laugh at myself . . . I caught my breath, then relaxed.

"Okay, Davy," I said. "What are you doing out so early?"

"I haven't been to bed," said Davy, drifting out of the shadows. "Dad said I could try my scribe tonight. I just got it finished."

"That thing?" I laughed up at him. "What could you scribe at night?"

"Well," Davy sat down in the air above my blanket, rubbing his thumbs on the tiny box he was holding. "I thought it might be able to scribe dreams, but it won't. Not enough verbalizing in them. I checked my whole family and used up half my scribe tape. Gotta make some more today."

"Nasty break," I said. "Back to the drawing boards, boy."

"Oh, I don't know," said Davy, "I tried it on your dreams—" he flipped up out of my casual swipe at him—"But I couldn't get anything. So I ran a chill down your spine—"

"You rat," I said, too lazy to resent it very much. "That's why I woke up so hard and quick."

"Yup," he said, drifting back over me. "So I tried it on you awake. More concentrated thought patterns."

"Hey!" I sat up slowly. "Concentrated thought?"

"Take this last part." Davy drifted up again. There was a quacking gobble. "Ope!" he said. "Forgot the slowdown. Thoughts are fast. Now—"

And clearly and minutely, like a voice sometimes sounds from a telephone receiver, I heard myself yelling, "Let's leave, let's get out of this crumby joint—"

"Davy!" I yelled, launching myself upward, encumbered as I was with blankets.

"Watch it! Watch it!" he cried, holding the scribe away from

me as we tumbled in the air. "Group interest! I claim group interest! With the ship here now—"

"Group interest, nothing!" I said as I finally got my hands on the scriber. "You're forgetting privacy of thought—and the penalty for violation thereof." I caught his flying thought and pushed the right area on the box to erase the record.

"Dagnab!" said Davy, disgruntled. "My first invention and you erase my first recording on it."

"Nasty break," I said. Then I tossed the box to him. "But say!" I reached up and pulled him down to me. "Obla! Think about Obla and this screwy gadget!"

"Yeah!" His face lighted up, then blanked as he was snatched along by the train of thought. "Yeah! Obla—no audible voice—" He had already forgotten me before the trees received him.

It wasn't that I had been ashamed of my thoughts. It was only that they sounded so—so naked, made audible. I stood there, my hands flattened against the beautiful ship and felt my conviction solidify. "Let's do. Let's leave. If there isn't room for us on this ship, we can build others. Let's find a real Home somewhere. Either find one or build one."

I think it was at that moment that I began to say goodbye to Earth, almost subconsciously beginning to sever the ties that bound me to it. Like the slow out-fanning of a lifting wing, the direction of my thoughts turned skyward. I lifted my eyes. *This time next year, I thought, I won't be watching morning lighting up Old Baldy.*

By midmorning the whole of the Group, including the whole Group from Bendo, which had been notified, was waiting on the hillside near the ship, relaxing in the sun that was reluctant to leave Spring and launch into strenuous Summer. There was very little audible speech and not much gaiety. The ship brought back too much of the past and the dark streams of memory were coursing through the Group. I latched onto one stream and found only the shadows of the Crossing in it. *But the Home*, I interjected, *the Home before!*

Just then a glitter against the bulk of the ship drew our attention. The door was opening. There was a pause and then there were the four of them, Salla and her parents and another older fellow. The slight glintings of their personal shields were securely about them and, as they winced against the downpouring sun, their shields thickened above their heads and took on a deep blue tint.

The Oldest, his blind face turned to the ship, spoke on a Group stream.

"Welcome to the Group." His thought was organ-toned and cordial. "Thrice welcome among us. You are the first from the Home to follow us to Earth. We are eager for the news of our friends."

There was a sudden babble of thoughts. "Is Anna with you? Is Mark? Is Santhy? Is Bediah?"

"Wait, wait," the Father lifted his arms imploringly. "I cannot answer all of you at once except by saying—there are only the four of us in the ship."

"Four!" Almost, the astonished thought lifted an echo from Baldy.

"Why, yes," answered—he gave us his name—Shua. "My family and I and our motiver here, Laam."

"Then all the rest—?" Several of us slipped to our knees with the Sign trembling on our fingers.

"Oh no! No!" Shua was shocked. "No, we fared very well in our New Home. Almost all your friends await you eagerly. As you remember, ours was the Group living adjacent to yours on The Home. Our Group and two others reached our new Home. Why we brought this ship empty so we could take you all Home!"

"Home?" For a stunned moment the word hung almost visibly in the air above us.

Then, "Home!" The cry rose and swelled and broke to audibility as the whole Group took to the sky as one. Such a jubilant ecstatic cry it was that it shook an echo sufficient to frighten a pair of blue jays from a clump of pines on the flat.

"Why they must all think the way I do!" I thought, astonished, as I joined in the upsurge and the jubilant chorus of the wordless Homeward Song. Then I flatted a little as I wondered if any of them shared with me the sudden twinge of that odd pang I had felt before. I tucked it quickly away, deep enough so that only a Sorter would be able to find it, and quickly cradled the Francher Kid in my lifting—he hadn't learned to go much beyond the tree tops yet, and the Group was leaving him behind. . . .

"There's four of them," I thought breathlessly at Obla. "Only four. They brought the ship to take us Home."

Obla turned her blind face to me. "To take us all? Just like that?"

"Well, yes," I replied, frowning a little. "I guess just like that—whatever that means."

"After all, I suppose castaways are always eager for rescue," said Obla. Then, gently mocking, "I suppose you're all packed?"

"I've been packed almost since I was born," I said. "Haven't I always been talking about getting out of this bind that holds us back?"

"You have," thought Obla. "Exhaustively talked about it. Put your hand out the window, Bram. Take a handful of sun." I did, filling my palm with the tingling brightness. "Pour it out." I tilted my hand and felt the warm flow of escaping light. "No more Earth sun ever again," she said. "Not ever!"

"Darn you, Obla, cut it out!" I cried.

"You weren't so entirely sure yourself, were you?" she asked. "Even after all your protestations. Even in spite of that big warm wonder growing inside you."

"Warm wonder?" Then I felt my face heat up. "Oh," I said awkwardly. "That's only natural interest in a stranger—a stranger from Home!" I felt excitement mounting. "Just think, Obla! From Home!"

"A stranger, from Home." Obla's thought was a little sad. "Listen to your words, Bram. A *stranger* from Home. When, ever, have People been strangers to one another?"

"You're playing with words now," I said. "Let me tell you the whole thing—"

I have used Obla for a sounding board ever since I can remember. I have no memory of her physically complete. I became conscious of her only after her disaster and mine. The same explosion that maimed her, took my parents. They were trying to get some Outsiders out of a crashed plane and didn't quite make it. Some of my most grandiose schemes have echoed hollow and empty against the listening receptiveness of Obla. And some of my shyest thoughts have grown to monumental strength with her uncritical acceptance of them. Somehow, when you hear your own ideas, crisply cut for transmission, they are stripped of anything extraneous and stand naked of pretensions, and *then* you can get a decent perspective on them.

"Poor child," she cut in when I told her of Salla's hair being caught. "Poor child, to feel that pain is a privilege—"

"Better that than having pain a way of life!" I flashed. "Who should know better than you?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," she said. "Who is to say which is better—to hunger and be fed, or to be fed so continuously that you never know hunger. Sometimes a little fasting is good for the soul. Think of a cold drink of water after an afternoon in the hayfield."

I shivered at the delicious recollection. "Well, *anyway* . . ." and I finished the account for her. I was almost out of the door before I suddenly realized that I hadn't mentioned Davy at all! I went back and told her. Before I was half through, her face twisted and her hair swirled protectively over it. When I finished, I stood there awkwardly, not knowing exactly what to do. Then I caught a faint echo of her thought. "A voice again . . ." I think a little of my contempt for gadgets died at the moment. Anything that could pleasure Obla . . .

I thought I was troubled about whether we should go or stay, until the afternoon I found all the Blends and In-Gathereds sitting together on the boulders above Cougar Creek. Dita was trailing the water from her bare toes and all the rest were concentrating

on the falling of the drops as though there were some answer in them. The Francher Kid was making a sharp crystal scale out of their falling. I came openly so there was no thought of eavesdropping, but I don't think they were fully aware that I was there.

"But for me," Dita drew her knees up to her chest and clasped her wet feet in her hands, "for me it's different. You're Blends, or all of the People. But I'm all of Earth. My roots are anchored in this old rock. Think what it would mean to me to say goodbye to my world. Think back to the Crossing—" A ripple of discomfort moved through the Group. "You see? And yet, to stay—to watch the People go, to know them gone—" She laid her cheek against her knees.

The quick comfort of the others enveloped her, and Low moved to the boulder beside her.

"It'd be as bad for us to leave," he said. "Sure, we're of the People, but this is the only Home we've known. I didn't grow up in a Group. None of us did. All of our roots are firmly set here, too. To leave—"

"What has the new Home to offer that we don't have here?" Peter started a little whirlpool in the shallow stream below.

"Well—" Low stilled the whirlpool and spoke into a lengthening silence. "Ask Bram. He's all afire to blast off." He grinned over his shoulder at me.

"The new Home is *our* world," I said, drifting over to them, gathering my scattered thoughts. "We would be among our own. No more need for concealment. No more trying to fit in where we don't fit. No more holding back, holding back when we could be doing so much."

I could feel the surge and swirl of thoughts around me—each person aligning himself to the vision of the Home. Without any further word, they all left the creek, absorbed in the problem. As they slowly scattered, there was not an echo of a thought. Everyone was shutting himself up with his own reactions.

All the peace and tranquillity of Cougar Canyon was gone. Oh, sure, the light still slanted brightly through the trees at dawn, the

wind still stirred the branches in the hot quiet afternoons and occasionally whipped up little whirlwinds to dance the dried leaves in a brief flurry of action, and the slender new moon was cleanly bright in the evening sky . . . but it was all overlaid with a big question mark.

I couldn't settle to anything. Halfway through ripping a plank at the mill, I'd think, "Why bother? We'll be gone soon." And then the spasm of acute pleasure and anticipation would somehow turn to the pain of bereavement and I'd feel like clutching a handful of sawdust and—well—sobbing into it.

And late at night, changing the headgates to irrigate another alfalfa field, I'd kick the moss-slick wet boards and think exultantly, "When we get *there*, we won't have to go through this mumbo-jumbo. We'll rain the water where and when we want it!"

Then again, I'd lie in the edge of the hot sun, my head in the shade of the cotton woods, and feel the deep soaking warmth to my very bone, smell the waiting, dusty smell of the afternoon, feel sleep wrapping itself around my thoughts and hear the sudden creaking cries of the red-winged blackbirds in the far fields, and suddenly *know* that I couldn't leave it. Couldn't give up Earth for anything or any place.

But there was Salla. Showing her Earth was like nothing you could ever imagine. For instance, it never occurred to her that things could hurt her. Like the day I found her half-way across Furnace Flat, huddled under a piñon pine, cradling her bare feet in her hands and rocking with pain.

"Where are your shoes?" It was the first thing I could think of as I hunched beside her.

"Shoes?" She caught the picture from me, "Oh, shoes. My—sandals—are at the ship. I wanted to *feel* this world. We shield so much at home that I couldn't tell you a thing about textures there. But the sand was so good the first night, and water is wonderful, I thought this black, glowing smoothness and splinteredness would be a different sort of texture." She smiled ruefully. "It is. It's hot and—and—"

I supplied a word, "Hurty. I should think so. This shale flat

heats up like a furnace this time of day. That's why it's called Furnace Flat."

"I landed in the middle of it, running," she said. "I was so surprised that I didn't have sense enough to lift or shield."

"Let me see." I loosened her fingers and took one of her slender white feet in my hand. "Adonday Veeah!" I whistled. Carefully I picked off a few loose flakes of bloodstained shale. "You've practically blistered your feet too. Don't you know the sun can be vicious this time of day?"

"I know now," she said. She took her feet back and peered at the sole.

"Look!" she cried. "There's blood!"

"Yep," I said. "That's usual when you puncture your skin. Better come on back to the house and get those feet taken care of."

"Taken care of?"

"Sure. Antiseptic for the germs, salve for the burns. You won't go hunting for a day or two. Not with your feet, anyway."

"Can't we just no-bi and transgraph? It's so much simpler."

"Indubitably," I said lifting sitting as she did and straightening up in the air above the path. "If I knew what you were talking about." We headed for the house.

"Well, at Home, the Healers—"

"This is Earth," I said. "We have no Healers as yet. Only insofar as our Sensitive can help out those who know about healing. It's mostly a do-it-yourself deal with us. And who knows, you might be allergic to us and sprout daylilies at every puncture. It'll probably worry your mother—"

"Mother—" There was a curious pause. "Mother is annoyed with me already. She feels that I'm definitely *undene*. She wishes she'd left me Home. She's afraid I'll never be the same again."

"*Undene*?" I asked, because Salla had sent out no clarification with the term.

"Yes," she said, and I caught at visualization after unfamiliar visualization until finally light began to dawn.

"Well! We don't exactly eat peas with our knives or wipe our

noses on our sleeves! We can be pretty couth when we set our minds to it."

"I know, I know," she hastened to say, "but Mother—well, you know some mothers."

"Yes, I know," I said. "But if you never walk or climb or swim or anything like that, what do you do for fun?"

"It's not that we never do them," she said. "But seldom casually and unthinkingly. We're supposed to outgrow the need for childish activities like that," she said. "We're supposed to be capable of more intellectual pleasures."

"Like what?" I held the branches aside for her to descend to the kitchen door, and nearly kinked my shoulder trying to do that and open the door for her simultaneously. After several false starts and stops and a feeling of utter foolishness like when you try to dodge past a person who tried to dodge past you, we ended up at the kitchen table with Salla gasping at the smart of the merthiolate. "Like what?" I repeated.

"Hoosh! That's quite a sensation." She loosened her clutch on her ankles and relaxed under the soothing salve I spread on her reddened feet.

"Well, Mother's favorite—and she does it very well—is anticipating. She likes roses."

"So do I," I said, bewildered, "but I seldom anticipate in connection with them."

Salla laughed. I liked to hear her laugh. It was more nearly a musical phrase than a laugh. The Francher Kid, the first time he heard it, made a composition of it. Of course neither he nor I liked it very much when the other kids in the Canyon, revved it up and used it for a dance tune, but I must admit it had quite a beat . . . Well, anyway, Salla laughed.

"You know, for two people using the same words, we certainly come out at different comprehensions. No . . . what Mother likes is Anticipating a Rose. She chooses a bud that looks interesting—she knows all the finer distinctions—then she *makes* a rose, synthetic, as nearly like the real bud as she can. Then, for two or three days, she sees if she can anticipate every movement of the

opening of the real rose by opening her synthetic simultaneously, or, if she's very adept, just barely ahead of the other." She laughed again. "It's one of our family stories—the time she chose a bud that did nothing for two days, then shivered to dust. Somehow it had been sprayed with *destro*. Mother's never quite got over the humiliation."

"Maybe I'm being *undene*," I said, "but I can't see spending two days watching a rose bud."

"And yet you spent a whole hour just looking at the sky last evening," said Salla. "And four of you spent hours last night receiving and displaying cards. You got quite emotional over it several times."

"Umm—well, yes," I said. "But that's different. A sunset like that, and the way Jemmy plays—" I caught the teasing in her eyes and we laughed together. Laughter needs no interpreter, at least not our laughter.

Salla took so much pleasure in sampling our world that, as is usual, I discovered things about our neighborhood that I hadn't known before. It was she who found the cave, because she was curious about the tiny trickle of water high on the slope of Baldy.

"Just a spring," I told her, as we looked up at the dark streak that marked a fold in the massive cliff.

"Just a spring," she mocked. "In this land of little water, is there such a thing as *just* a spring?"

"It's not worth anything," I protested, following her up into the air. "You can't even drink from it."

"It could ease a heart hunger though," she said. "The sight of wetness in an arid land."

"It can't even splash," I said, as we neared the streak.

"No," said Salla, holding her forefinger to the end of the moisture. "But it can grow things." Lightly she touched the minute little green plants that clung to the rock wall and the dampness.

"Pretty," I said, perfunctorily. "But look at the view from here."

We turned around, pressing our backs to the sheer cliff, and looked out over the vast stretches of red-to-purple-to-blue ranges of mountains, jutting fiercely naked or solidly forested or speckled

with growth as far as we could see. And lazily, far away, a shaft of smelter smoke rose and bent almost at right angles as an upper current caught it and thinned it to haze. Below, fold after fold of the hills hugged protectively to themselves the tiny comings and goings and dwelling places of those who had lost themselves in the vastness.

"And yet," almost whispered Salla. "If you're lost in vast enough vastness, you find yourself—a different self, a self that has only Being and the Presence to contemplate."

"True," I said, breathing deeply of sun and pine and hot granite. "But not many reach that vastness. Most of us size our little worlds to hold enough distractions to keep us from having to contemplate Being and God."

There was a moment's deep silence as we let our own thoughts close the subject. Then Salla lifted and I started down.

"Hey!" I called, "That's up!"

"I know it," she called. "And that's down! I still haven't found the spring!"

So I lifted too, grumbling at the stubbornness of women, and arrived even with Salla just as she perched tentatively on a sharp spur of rock on the edge of the vegetation-covered gash that was the beginning of the oozing wetness. She looked straight down the dizzy thousands of feet below us.

"What beautiful downness!" she said, pleased.

"If you were afraid of heights—" I suggested.

She looked at me quickly. "Are some people?" she asked, "Really?"

"Some are," I said, "I read one, one time. Would you care to try the texture of *that*?" And I created for her the horrified, frantic, dying terror of an Outsider friend of mine who hardly dares look out of a second story window.

"Oh, no!" She paled and clung to the scanty draping of vines and branches of the cleft. "No more! No more!"

"I'm sorry," I said. "But it is a different sort of emotion. I think of it every time I read—neither height nor depth nor any

other creature.' Height to my friend is a creature—a horrible hovering destroyer waiting to pounce on him."

"It's too bad," said Salla, "that he doesn't remember to go on to the next phase, and learn to lose his fear—"

By quick common consent we switched subjects in mid-air.

"This is the source," I said. "Satisfied?"

"No." She groped among the vines. "I want to see a trickle trickle, and a drop drop from the beginning." She burrowed deeper.

Rolling my eyes to heaven for patience, I helped her hold back the vines. She reached for the next layer—and suddenly wasn't there.

"Salla!" I scrabbled at the vines. "Salla!"

"H-h-here." I caught her subvocal answer.

"Talk!" I said, as I felt her thought melt out of my consciousness.

"*I am talking!*" Her reply broke to audibility on the last word. "And I'm sitting in some awfully cold, wet water. Do come in."

I squirmed cautiously through the narrow cleft into the darkness, and stumbled to my knees in icy water almost waist deep.

"It's dark," whispered Salla, and her voice ran huskily around the place.

"Wait for your eyes to change," I whispered back, and, groping through the water caught her hand and clung to it. But even after a breathless sort of pause, our eyes could not pick up enough light to see by—only faint green shimmer where the cleft was.

"Had enough?" I asked. "Is this trickly and drippy enough?" I lifted our hands and the water sluiced off our elbows.

"I want to see," she protested.

"Matches," I said, "are inoperative when they're wet. Flash-light have I none. Suggestions?"

"Well, no," she said. "You don't have any Glowlers living here, do you?"

"Since the word rings no bell, I guess not," I said. "But, say!" I dropped her hand and, rising to my knees, fumbled for my

pocket. "Dita taught me—or tried to after Valancy told her how—come—" I broke off, immersed in the problem of trying to get a hand into and out of the pocket of skin-tight wet levis.

"I know I'm an Outlander," said Salla plaintively, "but I thought I had a fairly comprehensive knowledge of your language."

"Dita's the Outsider that we found with Low. She's got some Gifts and Persuasions none of us have. There!" I grunted, and settled back in the water. "Now if I can remember."

I held the thin dime between my fingers and shifted all those multiples of mental gears that are so complicated until you work your way through their complexity to the underlying simplicity. I concentrated my whole self on that little disc of metal. There was a sudden blinding spurt of light. Salla cried out and I damped the light quickly to a more practical level.

"I did it!" I cried. "I glowed it first thing, this time! It took me half an hour last time to get a spark!"

Salla was looking in wonder at the tiny globe of brilliance in my hand. "And an Outsider can do *that*?"

"Can do!" I said, suddenly very proud of our Outsiders. "And so can I, now! There you are, Ma'am," I twanged. "Yore light, yore cave—look to yore little heart's content."

I don't suppose it was much as caves go. The floor was sand, pale, granular, almost sugar-like. The pool—out of which we both dripped as soon as we sighted dry land—had no apparent source, but stayed always at the same level in spite of the slender flow that streaked the cliff. The roof was about twice my height and the pool was no farther than that across. The walls curved protectively close around the water. At first glance there was nothing special about the cave. There weren't even any stalactites or gmites—just the sand and the quiet pool shimmering a little in the light of the glowed coin.

"Well!" Salla sighed happily as she pushed back her heavy hair with wet hands. "This is where it begins."

"Yes," I said, closing my hand around the dime and watching

the light spray between my fingers. "Wetly, I might point out."

Salla was scrambling across the sand on all fours.

"It's high enough to stand," I said, following her.

"I'm being a cave creature." She smiled back over her shoulder.

"Not a human surveying a kingdom. It looks different from down here."

"Okay, troglodyte," I said. "How does it look down there?"

"Marvelous!" Salla's voice was very soft. "Bring the light and look!"

We lay on our stomachs and peered into the tiny tunnel, hardly a foot across, that Salla had found. I focused the light down the narrow passageway. The whole thing was a lacy network of delicate crystals, white, clear, rosy and pale green, so fragile that I held my breath lest they break. The longer I looked, the more wonder I saw—miniature forests of snowflake-like laciness, flights of fairy steps, castles and spires, flowers terraced up gentle hillsides and branches of blossoms almost alive enough to sway. An arm's length down the tunnel a quietly bright pool reflected the perfection around it to double the enchantment.

Salla and I looked at each other, our faces so close together that we were mirrored in one another's eyes—eyes that stated and re-affirmed: *Ours—no one else in all the Universe shares this spot with us.*

Wordlessly we sat back on the sand. I don't know about Salla, but I was having a little difficulty with my breathing, because, for some odd reason, it seemed necessary to hold my breath to shield from being easily read as a child.

"Let's leave the light," whispered Salla. "It'll stay lighted without you, won't it?"

"Yeah," I said. "Indefinitely."

"Leave it by the little cave," she said. "Then we'll know it's always lighted and lovely."

We edged our way out of the cleft in the cliff and hovered there for a minute, laughing at our bedraggled appearance. Then we headed for home and dry clothes.

"I wish Obla could see the cave," I said impulsively. Then

wished I hadn't because I caught Salla's immediate displeased protest.

"I mean," I said awkwardly, "she never gets to see—" I broke off. After all she wouldn't be able to see any better if she were there. I would have to be her eyes.

"Obla." Salla wasn't vocalizing now. "She's very near to you."

"She's almost my second self," I said.

"A relative?"

"No," I said. "Only as souls are related."

"I can feel her in your thoughts so often," said Salla. "And yet—have I ever met her?"

"No," I said. "She doesn't meet people." I was holding in my mind the clean, uncluttered strength of Obla; then again I caught Salla's distressed protest and her feeling of being excluded, before she shielded. Still I hesitated. I didn't want to share. Obla was more an expression of myself than a separate person. An expression that was hidden and precious. I was afraid to share—afraid that it might be like touching a finger to a fragile chemical fern in the little tunnel, that there wouldn't even be a ping before the perfection shivered to shapeless powder.

Two weeks after the ship arrived, a general Group meeting was called. We all gathered on the flat around the ship. It looked like a field day at first, with the flat filled with laughing lifting children playing tag above the heads of the more sedate elders. The kids my age clustered at one side, tugged towards playing tag, too, but restrained because after all you do outgrow some things, when people are looking. I sat there with them, feeling an emptiness beside me. Salla was with her parents.

The Oldest was not there. He was at home struggling to contain his being in the broken body that was becoming more and more a dissolving prison. So Jemmy called us to attention.

"Long drawn periods of indecision are not good," he said without preliminary. "The ship has been here two weeks. We have all faced our problem—to go or to stay. There are many of us who

have not yet come to a decision. This we must do soon. The ship will Up a week from today. To help us decide, we are now open to *brief* statements pro or con."

There was an odd tightening feeling as the whole Group flowed into a common thought stream and became a single unit instead of a mass of individuals.

"I will go." It was the thought of the Oldest from his bed back in the Canyon. "The New Home has the means to help me, so that the years yet allotted to me may be nearly painless. Since the Crossing—" He broke off, flashing an amused, "'Brief!'"

"I will stay." It was the voice of one of the young girls from Bendo. "We have only started to make Bendo a place fit to live in. I like beginnings. The New Home sounds finished, to me."

"I don't want to go away," piped a very young voice. "My radishes are just coming up and I hafta water them all the time. They'd die if I left." Amusement rippled through the group and relaxed us.

"I'll go." It was Matt, called back from Tech by the ship's arrival. "In the Home, my field of specialization has developed far beyond what we have at Tech or anywhere else. But I'm coming back."

"There can be no free and easy passage back and forth between the Home and Earth," warned Jemmy, "for a number of very valid reasons."

"I'll chance it," said Matt. "I'll make it back."

"I'm staying," said the Francher Kid. "Here on Earth we're different with a plus. There we'd be different with a minus. What we can do and do well, won't be special there. I don't want to go where I'd be making ABC songs. I want my music to go on being big."

"I'm going," said Jake, his voice mocking as usual. "I'm through horsing around. I'm going to become a solid citizen. But I want to go in for—" his verbalization stopped, and all I could comprehend was an angular sort of concept wound with time and space as with serpentine. I saw my own blankness on the faces around

me, and felt a little less stupid. "See," said Jake. "That's what I've been having on the tip of my mind for a long time. Shua tells me they've got a fair beginning on it there. I'm willing to ABC it for a while for a chance at something like that."

I cleared my throat. Here was my chance to broadcast to the whole Group what I intended to do! Apparently I was the only one seeing the situation clearly enough. "I . . ."

It was as though I'd stepped into a dense fog bank. I felt as though I'd gone blind and dumb at one stroke. I had a feeling of being torn like a piece of paper. I lost all my breath as I became vividly conscious of my actual thoughts. *I didn't want to go!* I was snatched into a mad whirlpool of thoughts at this realization. How could I stay after all I'd said? How could I go and know Earth no more? How could I stay and let Salla go? How could I go and leave Obla behind? Dimly I heard someone else's voice finishing:

". . . because Home or no Home, *this* is Home to me!"

I closed my gaping, wordless mouth and wet my dry lips. I could see again—see the Group slowly dissolving—the Bendo Group gathering together under the trees, the rest drifting away from the flat. Low leaned across the rock. "S'matter, feller?" he laughed. "Cat got your tongue? I expected a blast of eloquence from you that'd push the whole Group up the gang-plank."

"Bram's bashful!" teased Dita. "He doesn't like to make his convictions known!"

I tried a sort of smile. "Pity me, people," I said. "Before you stands a creature shorn of convictions, nekkid as a jay bird in the cold winds of indecision."

"Fresh out of long-johns," said Peter, sobering. "But there's plenty of sympathy available."

"Thanks," I said. "Noted and appreciated."

I couldn't take my new doubt and indecision, the new tumult and pain to Obla—not when she was so much a part of it, so I took them up into the hills. I perched like a brooding buzzard on the stone spur outside the little cave, high above the Canyon.

Wildly, until my throat ached and my voice croaked, I railed against this world and its limitations. Hoarsely I whispered over all the lets and hindrances that plagued us—that plagued me. And, infuriatingly, the world and all its echoes placidly paced my every argument with solid rebuttal. I was hearing with both ears now, one for my own voice, one for the world's reply. And my voice got fainter and fainter and Earth's voice wasn't a whisper any more.

"Nothing is the way it should be!" I hoarsely yelled my last weary assault at the evening sky.

"And never will be, short of eternity," replied the streak of sunset crimson.

"But we could do so much more—"

"Whoever heard of bread made only of leaven?" replied the first evening star.

"We're being wasted," I whispered.

"So is the wheat when it's broadcast in the field," answered the fringe of pines on the crest of a far hill.

"But Salla will go. She'll be gone—"

And nothing answered—only the wind cried and a single piece of dislodged gravel rattled down into the darkness.

"Salla!" I cried, "Salla will be gone! Answer *that* one if you can!" But the world was through with answers. The wind became very busy humming through the dusk.

"Answer me!" I had only a whisper left.

"I will." The voice was very soft, but it shook me like a blast of lightning. "I can answer." Salla eased lightly down on the spur beside me. "Salla is staying."

"Salla!" I could only clutch the rock and stare.

"Mother had a *quanic* when I told her," smiled Salla, easing the tight, uncomfortable emotion. "I told her I needed a research paper to finish my Level requirements and that this would be just perfect for it.

"She said I was too young to know my own mind. I said finishing high in my Level would be quite a feather in her cap—if you'll pardon the provincialism. And she said she didn't even know your

parents." Salla colored, her eyes wavering. "I told her there had been no Word between us. That we were not Two-ing. Yet. Much."

"It doesn't have to be now!" I cried, grabbing both her hands. "Oh, Salla! Now we can afford to wait!" And I yanked her off the spur into the maddest, wildest flight of my life. Like a couple of crazy things, we split and resplit the air above Baldy, soaring and diving like drunken lightning. But all the time part of us was moving so far, so fast, another part of us was talking quietly together, planning, wondering, rejoicing, as serenely as if we were back in the cave again, seeing each other in quiet reflective eyes. Finally darkness closed in entirely and we leaned exhausted against each other, drifting slowly towards the Canyon floor.

"Obla," I said. "Let's go tell Obla." There was no need to shield any part of my life from Salla any more. In fact there was a need to make it a cohesive whole, complete with both Obla and Salla.

Obla's windows were dark. That meant no one was visiting her. She would be alone. I rapped lightly on the door—my own particular rap.

"Bram? Come in!" I caught welcome from Obla.

"I brought Salla," I said. "Let me turn the light on." I stepped in.

"Wait—"

But simultaneously with her cry, I flipped the light switch.

"Salla," I started, "this is—"

Salla screamed and threw her arm across her eyes, a sudden over-flooding of horrified revulsion choked the room and Obla was fluttering in the far upper corner of the room—hiding—hiding herself behind the agonized swirl of her hair, her broken body in the twisting of her white gown, pressing itself to the walls, struggling for escape, her startled physical and mental anguish moaning almost audibly around us.

I grabbed Salla and yanked her out of the room, snapping the light off as we went. I dragged her out to the edge of the yard where the canyon walls shot upwards. I flung her against the sand-

stone wall. She turned and hid her face against the rock, sobbing. I grabbed her shoulders and shook her.

"How could you!" I gritted between my teeth, outraged anger thickening my words. "Is *that* the kind of people the Home is turning out now? Counting arms and legs and eyes more than the person?" Her tumbling hair whipped across my chin. "Permitting rejection and disgust for any living soul? Aren't you taught even common kindness and compassion?" I wanted to hit her—to hit anything solid to protest this unthinkable thing that had been done to Obla—this unhealable wounding.

Salla snatched herself out of my grasp and hovered just out of reach, wet eyes glaring angrily down at me.

"It's your fault, too!" she snapped, tears flowing. "I'd have died rather than do a thing like that to Obla or anyone else—if I had known! You didn't tell me. You never visualized her that way—only strength and beauty and wholeness!"

"Why not!" I shot back angrily, lifting level with her. "That's the only way I ever see her any more. And trying to shift the blame—"

"It is your fault! Oh Bram!" And she was crying in my arms. When she could speak again between sniffs and hiccoughs, she said, "We don't have people like that at Home. I mean, I never saw a—an incomplete person. I never saw scars and mutilation. Don't you see, Bram. I was holding myself ready to receive her, completely—because she was part of you. And then to find myself embracing—" She choked. "Look," she went on, "look, Bram, we have transgraph and—and regeneration—and no one ever stays unfinished."

I let go of her slowly, lost in wonder. "Regeneration? Transgraph?"

"Yes, yes!" cried Salla. "She can have back her legs. She can have her arms again. She can have her beautiful face again. She may even get back her eyes and her voice, though I don't know for sure about that. She can be Obla again, instead of a dark prison for Obla."

"No one told us."

"No one asked."

"Common concern."

"I'll ask then. Have you any *dobic* children? And cases of *Cazerinea*? And *Trimorph Semia*? It's not that we don't want to ask. How are we to know *what* to ask? We've never even heard of a—a basket case." She took the word from me. "It just didn't occur to us to ask."

"I'm sorry," I said, drying her eyes with the palms of my hands, lacking anything better. "I should have told you." My words were but scant surface indications of my deep abject apology.

"Come," she said, pulling away from me. "We must go to Obla—not—right now."

It was Salla who finally coaxed Obla back down to her bed. It was Salla who persuaded the frantic twining hair to untwist. It was Salla who held the broken, weeping face against her slight young shoulder and poured the healing balms of her sorrow and understanding over Obla's wounds. As it was Salla who told Obla of what The Home held for her. Told her and told her and told her, until Obla finally believed.

All three of us were limp and weary by then, and all three content just to sit for a minute, so the explosion of Davy into the room was twice the shock it ordinarily would have been.

"Hi, Bram! Hi, Salla! Hey, Obla! I got it fixed now. It won't hiss on the S's any more and you can trip the playback yourself. Here." He plopped onto her pillow the little cube I recognized as his scribe. "Try it out. Go on. Try it out on Bram."

Obla turned her face until her cheek felt the cube. Salla looked at me in wonderment and then at Obla. There was a brief pause and then a slight click and I heard, tiny but distinct, the first audible work I'd ever heard from Obla.

"Bram! Oh, Bram! Now I can go with you. I won't be left behind. And when we get to the Home, I'll be whole again! Whole again!"

Through my shock I heard Davy say, "You didn't even use one S, Obla! Say something S-y, so's I can check it."

Obla thought I was going to the Home! She expected me to

go with her! She didn't know I'd decided to stay. That we were going to stay. I met Salla's eyes. Our communication was quick and complete before the small voice said, "Salla, my sweet sister! I trust that's sufficiently S-yl!" And I heard Obla's laugh for the first time.

So, somewhere way back there, there is a tiny cave with a dime glowing in it, keeping in trust a preciousness between Salla and me—a candle in the window of memory. Somewhere way back there are the sights and sounds, the smells and tastes, the homeness of Earth. For a while I have turned my back on the Promised Land. For our Jordan was crossed those long years ago. My trouble was that I thought that wherever I looked, just because I did the looking, was the goal ahead. But all the time, the Crossing, simmering in the light of memory, had been something completed, not something yet to reach. My yearning for The Home must have been a little of the old hunger for the Flesh Pots that haunts any pioneering effort.

And Salla— Well, sometimes when I'm not looking, she looks at me and then at Obla. And sometimes when she isn't looking, I look at her and then at Obla. Obla has no eyes, but sometimes when we aren't looking, she looks at me and then at Salla.

Things will happen to all three of us before Earth swells again in the portholes, but whatever happens, Earth *will* swell in the portholes again—at least for me. And *then* I will truly be coming Home.

One of the many curious aspects of the communications industry—associated principally with New York's Madison Avenue—is its reluctance to *receive* communications. "The Devil take it!" many a man has said. But would that, Mr. Bester asks, help?

Will You Wait?

by Alfred Bester

They keep writing those antiquated stories about bargains with the Devil. You know . . . sulphur, spells and pentagrams; tricks, snares and delusions. They don't know what they're talking about. Twentieth century diabolism is slick and streamlined, like jukeboxes and automatic elevators and television and all the other modern efficiencies that leave you helpless and infuriated.

A year ago I got fired from an agency job for the third time in ten months. I had to face the fact that I was a failure. I was also dead broke. I decided to sell my soul to the Devil, but the problem was how to find him. I went down to the main reference room of the library and read everything on demonology and devillore. Like I said, it was all just talk. Anyway, if I could have afforded the expensive ingredients which they claimed could raise the Devil, I wouldn't have had to deal with him in the first place.

I was stumped, so I did the obvious thing; I called Celebrity Service. A delicate young man answered.

I asked, "Can you tell me where the Devil is?"

"Are you a subscriber to Celebrity Service?"

"No."

"Then I can give you no information."

"I can afford to pay a small fee for one item."

"You wish limited service?"

"Yes."

"Who is the celebrity, please?"

"The Devil."

"Who?"

"The Devil . . . Satan, Lucifer, Scratch, Old Nick . . . The Devil."

"One moment, please." In five minutes he was back, extremely annoyed. "Veddy soddy. The Devil is no longer a celebrity."

He hung up. I did the sensible thing and looked through the telephone directory. On a page decorated with ads for Sardi's Restaurant I found Satan, Shaitan, Carnage & Bael, 477 Madison Avenue, Judson 3-1900. I called them. A bright young woman answered.

"SSC&B. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan, please?"

"The lines are busy. Will you wait?"

I waited and lost my dime. I wrangled with the operator and lost another dime but got the promise of a refund in postage stamps. I called Satan, Shaitan, Carnage & Bael again.

"SSC&B. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan? And please don't leave me hanging on the phone. I'm calling from a—"

The switchboard cut me off and buzzed. I waited. The coin-box gave a warning click. At last a line opened.

"Miss Hogan's office."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan?"

"Who's calling?"

"He doesn't know me. It's a personal matter."

"I'm sorry. Mr. Satan is no longer with our organization."

"Can you tell me where I can find him?"

There was muffled discussion in broad Brooklyn and then Miss Hogan spoke in crisp Secretary: "Mr. Satan is now with Beëlzebub, Belial, Devil & Orgy."

I looked them up in the phone directory. 383 Madison Avenue, Plaza 6-1900. I dialed. The phone rang once and then choked. A metallic voice spoke in sing-song: "The number you are dialing is not a working number. Kindly consult your directory for the correct number. This is a recorded message." I consulted my directory. It said Plaza 6-1900. I dialed again and got the same recorded message.

I finally broke through to a live operator who was persuaded to give me the new number of Beëlzebub, Belial, Devil & Orgy. I called them. A bright young woman answered.

"B.B.D.O. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Satan, please?"

"Who?"

"Mr. Satan."

"I'm sorry. There is no such person with our organization."

"Then give me Beëlzebub or the Devil."

"One moment, please."

I waited. Every half minute she opened my wire long enough to gasp: "Still ringing the Dev—" and then cut off before I had a chance to answer. At last a bright young woman spoke. "Mr. Devil's office."

"May I speak to him?"

"Who's calling?"

I gave her my name.

"He's on another line. Will you wait?"

I waited. I was fortified with a dwindling reserve of nickels and dimes. After twenty minutes, the bright young woman spoke again: "He's just gone into an emergency meeting. Can he call you back?"

"No. I'll try again."

Nine days later I finally got him.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you?"

I took a breath. "I want to sell you my soul."

"Have you got anything on paper?"

"What do you mean, anything on paper?"

"The Property, my boy. The Sell. You can't expect B.B.D.O. to buy a pig in a poke. We may drink out of dixie cups up here, but the sauce has got to be a hundred proof. Bring in your Presentation. My girl'll set up an appointment."

I prepared a Presentation of my soul with plenty of Sell. Then I called his girl.

"I'm sorry, he's on the Coast. Call back in two weeks."

Five weeks later she gave me an appointment. I went up and

sat in the photo-montage reception room of B.B.D.O. for two hours, balancing my Sell on my knees. Finally I was ushered into a corner office decorated with Texas brands in glowing neon. The Devil was lounging on his contour chair, dictating to an Iron Maiden. He was a tall man with the phoney voice of a sales manager; the kind that talks loud in elevators. He gave me a Sincere handshake and immediately looked through my Presentation.

"Not bad," he said. "Not bad at all. I think we can do business. Now what did you have in mind? The usual?"

"Money, success, happiness."

He nodded. "The usual. Now we're square shooters in this shop. B.B.D.O. doesn't dry-gulch. We'll guarantee money, success and happiness."

"For how long?"

"Normal life-span. No tricks, my boy. We take our estimates from the Actuary Tables. Offhand I'd say you're good for another forty, forty-five years. We can pin-point that in the contract later."

"No tricks?"

He gestured impatiently. "That's all bad public relations, what you're thinking. I promise you, no tricks."

"Guaranteed?"

"Not only do we guarantee service; we *insist* on giving service. B.B.D.O. doesn't want any beefs going up to the Fair Practice Committee. You'll have to call on us for service at least twice a year or the contract will be terminated."

"What kind of service?"

He shrugged. "Any kind. Shine your shoes; empty ashtrays; bring you dancing girls. That can be pin-pointed later. We just insist that you use us at least twice a year. We've got to give you a quid for your quo "*Quid pro quo. Check?*"

"But no tricks?"

"No tricks. I'll have our legal department draw up the contract. Who's representing you?"

"You mean an agent? I haven't got one."

He was startled. "Haven't got an agent? My boy, you're living

dangerously. Why, we could skin you alive. Get yourself an agent and tell him to call me."

"Yes, sir. M-May I . . . Could I ask a question?"

"Shoot. Everything is open and above-board at B.B.D.O."

"What will it be like for me . . . wh-when the contract terminates?"

"You really want to know?"

"Yes."

"I don't advise it."

"I want to know."

He showed me. It was like a hideous session with a psychoanalyst, in perpetuity . . . an eternal, agonizing self-indictment. It was hell. I was shaken.

"I'd rather have inhuman fiends torturing me," I said.

He laughed. "They can't compare to man's inhumanity to himself. Well . . . changed your mind, or is it a deal?"

"It's a deal."

We shook hands and he ushered me out. "Don't forget," he warned. "Protect yourself. Get an agent. Get the best."

I signed with Sibyl & Sphinx. That was on March 3. I called S & S on March 15. Mrs. Sphinx said: "Oh yes, there's been a hitch. Miss Sibyl was negotiating with B.B.D.O. for you, but she had to fly to Sheol. I've taken over for her."

I called April 1. Miss Sibyl said: "Oh yes, there's been a slight delay. Mrs. Sphinx had to go to Salem for a try-out. A witch-burning. She'll be back next week."

I called April 15. Miss Sibyl's bright young secretary told me that there was some delay getting the contracts typed. It seemed that B.B.D.O. was re-organizing its legal department. On May 1, Sibyl & Sphinx told me that the contracts had arrived and that *their* legal department was looking them over.

I had to take a menial job in June to keep body and soul together. I worked in the stencil department of a network. At least once a week a script would come in about a bargain with the Devil which was signed, sealed and delivered before the opening com-

mercial. I used to laugh at them. After four months of negotiation I was still threadbare.

I saw the Devil once, bustling down Park Avenue. He was running for Congress and was very busy being jolly and hearty with the electorate. He addressed every cop and doorman by first name. When I spoke to him he got a little frightened; thinking I was a Communist or worse. He didn't remember me at all.

In July, all negotiations stopped; everybody was away on vacation. In August everybody was overseas for some Black Mass Festival. In September Sibyl & Sphinx called me to their office to sign the contract. It was thirty-seven pages long, and fluttered with pasted-in corrections and additions. There were half a dozen tiny boxes stamped on the margin of every page.

"If you only knew the work that went into this contract," Sibyl & Sphinx told me with satisfaction.

"It's kind of long, isn't it?"

"It's the short contracts that make all the trouble. Initial every box, and sign on the last page. All six copies."

I initialed and signed. When I was finished I didn't feel any different. I'd expected to start tingling with money, success and happiness.

"Is it a deal now?" I asked.

"Not until *he's* signed it."

"I can't hold out much longer."

"We'll send it over by messenger."

I waited a week and then called.

"You forgot to initial one of the boxes," they told me.

I went to the office and initialed. After another week I called.

"*He* forgot to initial one of the boxes," they told me that time.

On October 1st I received a special delivery parcel. I also received a registered letter. The parcel contained the signed, sealed and delivered contract between me and the Devil. I could at last be rich, successful and happy. The registered letter was from B.B.D.O. and informed me that in view of my failure to comply with Clause 27-A of the contract, it was considered terminated,

and I was due for collection at their convenience. I rushed down to Sibyl & Sphinx.

"What's Clause 27-A?" they asked.

We looked it up. It was the clause that required me to use the services of the Devil at least once every six months.

"What's the date of the contract?" Sibyl & Sphinx asked.

We looked it up. The contract was dated March 1st, the day I'd had my first talk with the Devil in his office.

"March, April, May . . ." Miss Sibyl counted on her fingers. "That's right. Seven months have elapsed. Are you sure you didn't ask for *any* service?"

"How could I? I didn't have a contract."

"We'll see about this," Mrs. Sphinx said grimly. She called B.B.D.O. and had a spirited argument with the Devil and his legal department. Then she hung up. "He says you shook hands on the deal March 1st," she reported. "He was prepared in good faith to go ahead with his side of the bargain."

"How could I know? I didn't have a contract."

"Didn't you ask for anything?"

"No. I was waiting for the contract."

Sibyl & Sphinx called in their legal department and presented the case.

"You'll have to arbitrate," the legal department said, and explained that agents are forbidden to act as their client's attorney.

I hired the legal firm of Wizard, Warlock, Voodoo, Dowser & Hag (99 Watt Street, Exchange 3-1900) to represent me before the Arbitration Board (479 Madison Avenue, Lexington 5-1900). They asked for a \$200 retainer plus twenty percent of the contract's benefits. I'd managed to save \$34 during the four months I was working in the stencil department. They waived the retainer and went ahead with the Arbitration preliminaries.

On November 15 the network demoted me to the mail room, and I seriously contemplated suicide. Only the fact that my soul was in jeopardy in an arbitration stopped me.

The case came up December 12th. It was tried before a panel of three impartial Arbitrators and took all day. I was told they'd

mail me their decision. I waited a week and called Wizard, Warlock, Voodoo, Dowser & Hag.

"They've recessed for the Christmas holidays," they told me.

I called January 2.

"One of them's out of town."

I called January 10.

"He's back, but the other two are out of town."

"When will I get a decision?"

"It could take months."

"How do you think my chances look?"

"Well, we've never lost an arbitration."

"That sounds pretty good."

"But there can always be a first time."

That sounded pretty bad. I got scared and figured I'd better copper my bets. I did the sensible thing and hunted through the telephone directory until I found Seraphim, Cherubim and Angel, 666 Fifth Avenue, Templeton 6-1900. I called them. A bright young woman answered.

"Seraphim, Cherubim and Angel. Good morning."

"May I speak to Mr. Angel, please?"

"He's on another line. Will you wait?"

I'm still waiting.

Graham Greene has said, "The short story is an exacting form which I have never properly practised . . ." The following haunting little tale is sufficient, we think, to make one regretful that Mr. Greene has not practised the form more often.

Proof Positive

by Graham Greene

The tired voice went on. It seemed to surmount enormous obstacles to speech. The man's sick, Colonel Crashaw thought with pity and irritation. When a young man he had climbed in the Himalayas, and he remembered how at great heights several breaths had to be taken for every step advanced. The five-foot-high platform in the Music Rooms of The Spa seemed to entail for the speaker some of the same effort. He should never have come out on such a raw afternoon, thought Colonel Crashaw, pouring out a glass of water and pushing it across the lecturer's table. The rooms were badly heated, and yellow fingers of winter fog felt for cracks in the many windows. There was little doubt that the speaker had lost all touch with his audience. It was scattered in patches about the hall—elderly ladies who made no attempt to hide their cruel boredom, and a few men, with the appearance of retired officers, who put up a show of attention.

Colonel Crashaw, as president of the local Physical Society, had received a note from the speaker a little more than a week before. Written by a hand which trembled with sickness, age or drunkenness, it asked urgently for a special meeting of the society. An extraordinary, a really impressive, experience was to be described while still fresh in the mind, though what the experience had been was left vague. Colonel Crashaw would have hesitated to comply if the note had not been signed by a Major Philip Weaver, Indian Army, retired. One had to do what one could for a brother officer; the trembling of the hand must be either age or sickness.

It proved principally to be the latter when the two men met for the first time on the platform. Major Weaver was not more than sixty, tall, thin, and dark with an ugly obstinate nose and satire in his eye, the most unlikely person to experience anything unexplainable. What antagonized Crashaw most was that Weaver used scent; a white handkerchief which drooped from his breast pocket exhaled as rich and sweet an odor as a whole altar of lilies. Several ladies prinked their noses, and General Leadbitter asked loudly whether he might smoke.

It was quite obvious that Weaver understood. He smiled provocatively and asked very slowly, "Would you mind not smoking? My throat has been bad for some time." Crashaw murmured that it was terrible weather; influenza throats were common. The satirical eye came round to him and considered him thoughtfully, while Weaver said in a voice which carried half-way across the hall, "It's cancer in my case."

In the shocked vexed silence that followed the unnecessary intimacy he began to speak without waiting for any introduction from Crashaw. He seemed at first to be in a hurry. It was only later that the terrible impediments were placed in the way of his speech. He had a high voice, which sometimes broke into a squeal, and must have been peculiarly disagreeable on the parade ground. He paid a few compliments to the local society; his remarks were just sufficiently exaggerated to be irritating. He was glad, he said, to give them the chance of hearing him; what he had to say might alter their whole view of the relative values of matter and spirit.

Mystic stuff, thought Crashaw.

Weaver's high voice began to shoot out hurried platitudes. The spirit, he said, was stronger than anyone realized; the physiological action of heart and brain and nerves were subordinate to the spirit. The spirit was everything. He said again, his voice squeaking up like bats into the ceiling, "The spirit is so much stronger than you think." He put his hand across his throat and squinted sideways at the window-panes and the nuzzling fog, and upwards at the bare electric globe sizzling with heat and poor light in the dim afternoon. "It's immortal," he told them very seriously, and

they shifted, restless, uncomfortable, and weary, in their chairs.

It was then that his voice grew tired and his speech impeded. The knowledge that he had entirely lost touch with his audience may have been the cause. An elderly lady at the back had taken her knitting from a bag, and her needles flashed along the walls when the light caught them, like a bright ironic spirit. Satire for a moment deserted Weaver's eyes, and Crashaw saw the vacancy it left, as though the ball had turned to glass.

"This is important," the lecturer cried to them. "I can tell you a story—" His audience's attention was momentarily caught by this promise of something definite, but the stillness of the lady's needles did not soothe him. He sneered at them all. "Signs and wonders," he said.

Then he lost the thread of his speech altogether.

His hand passed to and fro across his throat and he quoted Shakespeare, and then St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. His speech, as it grew slower, seemed to lose all logical order, though now and then Crashaw was surprised by the shrewdness in the juxtaposition of two irrelevant ideas. It was like the conversation of an old man which flits from subject to subject, the thread a subconscious one. "When I was at Simla," he said, bending his brows as though to avoid the sunflash on the barrack square, but perhaps the frost, the fog, the tarnished room, broke his memories. He began to assure the wearied faces all over again that the spirit did not die when the body died, but that the body only moved at the spirit's will. One had to be obstinate, to grapple . . .

Pathetic, Crashaw thought, the sick man's clinging to his belief. It was as if life were an only son who was dying and with whom he wished to preserve some form of communication. . . .

A note was passed to Crashaw from the audience. It came from a Dr. Brown a small alert man in the third row; the society cherished him as a kind of pet sceptic. The note read: "Can't you make him stop? The man's obviously very ill. And what good is his talk, anyway?"

Crashaw turned his eyes sideways and upwards and felt his pity vanish at the sight of the roving satirical eyes that gave the lie to

the tongue, and at the smell, overpoweringly sweet, of the scent in which Weaver had steeped his handkerchief. The man was an "outsider"; he would look up his record in the old Army Lists when he got home.

"Proof positive," Weaver was saying, sighing a shrill breath of exhaustion between the words. Crashaw laid his watch upon the table, but Weaver paid him no attention. He was supporting himself on the rim of the table with one hand. "I'll give you," he said, speaking with increasing difficulty, "proof pos . . ." His voice scraped into stillness, like a needle at a record's end, but the quiet did not last. From an expressionless face, a sound which was more like a high mew than anything else jerked the audience into attention. He followed it up, still without a trace of any emotion or understanding, with a succession of incomprehensible sounds, a low labial whispering an odd jangling note, while his fingers tapped on the table. The sounds brought to mind innumerable séances, the bound medium, the tambourine shaken in mid-air, the whispered trivialities of loved ghosts in the darkness, the dinginess, the airless rooms.

Weaver sat down slowly in his chair and let his head fall backwards. An old lady began to cry nervously, and Dr. Brown scrambled on to the platform and bent over him. Colonel Crashaw saw the doctor's hand tremble as he picked the handkerchief from the pocket and flung it away from him. Crashaw, aware of another and more unpleasant smell, heard Dr. Brown whisper: "Send them all away. He's dead."

He spoke with a distress unusual in a doctor accustomed to every kind of death. Crashaw, before he complied, glanced over Dr. Brown's shoulder at the dead man. Major Weaver's appearance disquieted him. In a long life he had seen many forms of death, men shot by their own hand, and men killed in the field, but never such a suggestion of mortality. The body might have been one fished from the sea a long while after death; the flesh of the face seemed as ready to fall as an overripe fruit. So it was with no great shock of surprise that he heard Dr. Brown's whispered statement, "The man must have been dead a week."

What the Colonel thought of most was Weaver's claim—"Proof positive"—proof, he had probably meant, that the spirit outlived the body, that it tasted eternity. But all he had certainly revealed was how, without the body's aid, the spirit in seven days decayed into whispered nonsense.

As is true of most editors and writers, J. Francis McComas has many interests, but perhaps the most abiding with him is penology. Here he has produced a stimulating treatment in interstellar terms of the pros and cons of capital punishment.

Shock Treatment

by J. Francis McComas

The last witness for the prosecution finished his statement, rose from the witness chair, and walked back to the first row of the spectator section. His footsteps on the rough floor boards were loud in the quiet room. Hugo Blair, Citizens' Counsel, glanced down at his papers, looked briefly at the defense table, then turned to the bench.

"That closes the Citizens' case," he rasped. "I think we have proven beyond any doubt that the defendant, David Tasker, entered the combination store and living quarters of our pharmacist, Leon Jacoby, with intent to steal Jacoby's stock of the drug, dakarine. Jacoby discovered him, tried to reason with the thief, but Tasker stabbed Jacoby several times with a knife. Jacoby was killed instantly. Tasker then broke open a jar of dakarine, took most of the jar's contents, and, we presume, returned to his quarters. He was found there the following morning, wallowing in a dakarine-induced stupor, the blood-stained knife on his person. This horrible crime has removed from the community its only qualified pharmacist. It has—"

"Have you any more witnesses, Counselor?" Judge Anthony Hrdlicka asked sharply.

"No, sir, I have not—"

"You will stand down then, Counselor. I must remind you that the law says Counsel is instructed to present evidence, not comment on it." There was a brief pause, then Blair nodded jerkily and sat down at his table. "You've done very well in our first case, Mr. Blair," Hrdlicka continued easily. "Very well, indeed. Um. I

hope your conduct will serve as a model for all future Citizens' Counsels."

Blair's narrow shoulders were hunched and he stared down at his table, unmindful of the jury's vigorous nods of approval.

"Now," said Hrdlicka, "we'll hear from the defense. Counselor Giovannetti?"

Lisa Giovannetti arose. She still wore the skirt of her flight lieutenant's uniform but her primly cut blouse was made of recently milled new-world cloth, that dull product of the plant popularly called the "cotton weed."

"I am faced with a severe problem . . ."

Her voice was almost inaudible.

"You'll have to speak louder, my dear," Hrdlicka said. "Remember, we're all new to this, so there's nothing for you to be embarrassed about."

"I'm sorry . . . I was saying that I have a problem. My—ah—my client has refused to give me any cooperation whatsoever. He just won't talk to me. And I have no witnesses, of course. Frankly, since the defendant won't take the stand—you know he has refused to plead one way or the other . . ." She paused, looked helplessly at the judge, then at Blair.

Dr. Pierre Malory leaned closer to Brandt Cardozo and said softly, "That's the drug, you know." Cardozo nodded, frowning. "Shouldn't really be on trial yet," he muttered.

"Um." Hrdlicka scowled at the defendant. "Refuses to say anything, eh? That does put you in a spot, Miss Giovannetti. Any ideas on the problem?"

"I—under other conditions—back home, that is . . . I suppose I would just throw my client on the mercy of the court. That's the correct phrase? But here—well, we have decided to do things differently. I'm glad . . . I think I will be right to leave everything up to the court—the way the court will operate according to the new penal code . . ."

"Uh. You're just a little confused, Counselor, but I think I get your meaning. Yes . . ."

"I'm afraid I'm not a very eloquent counsel, Your Honor."

"But a wise one, my dear. Ahem!" Hrdlicka glared at the spectators. "I would remind all present that we are engaged in a very serious business! Um. Since our code makes provision for just such cases, we will accept the fact that Counselor Giovannetti offers no formal defense. Well." The old man leaned back in his chair and pushed his glasses up on his bald forehead. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, respected counsel, our penal code has left certain matters to our own discretion. After all, a committee of seven laymen—one steward and six passengers of a space liner—none of them skilled in legal problems, could hardly be expected to foresee every contingency. So it's up to us to establish precedent. Um. Now, our law says every criminal trial must be guided—and in a large sense, *resolved*—by the analyses of the accused by two officials of the court: the court psychiatrist and the state penologist."

He gestured at Brandt Cardozo and Dr. Malory.

"Both of these officials are present, of couse. And this court is bound by their recommendations. But it isn't clear just *when* they should offer such recommendations. Now, it seems logical to me that any such, ah, intimate discussions are not in order if an accused person is judged not guilty. Um. That's the way I see it. How about you, Mr. Blair?"

"I certainly do not believe theoretical evidence should be allowed to affect a verdict."

"Miss Giovannetti?"

"Isn't the psychiatric evidence intended to guide the *sentence*, Your Honor? Not the verdict?"

"Right. How about the experts themselves? What do you think, gentlemen?"

Cardozo and Malory glanced at each other and Malory nodded.

"I think Miss Giovannetti has exactly defined our position, sir," said Cardozo. "So we think the order you suggest is the proper one."

"Good." Hrdlicka scratched his nose. Brandt Cardozo was sure the old boy wanted a cigar very badly. "Well. According to USN law, this would be the time for the judge to charge the jury. But

this community, marooned on an unknown planet as we are, cannot consider itself one of the United Solar Nations. We have cut out the closing speeches by prosecution and defense attorneys so our judicial procedures won't be cluttered up with tear-jerking rantings about the grand old Solarian flag or the prisoner's dear old mother." The jury chuckled at this. "Further, we have expressly limited the scope of the judge's charge, so no jury will ever be improperly influenced by one man's opinions or—what's more likely—the state of one man's ulcers on one particular day." This time the jury laughed openly. "Or even by one man's attempts at humor," Hrdlicka blandly went on. "Now, much as I'd like to, I can't set any precedent on these lines, for the evidence presents no problems whatsoever. You've heard the testimony of your friends and neighbors, you've listened to the men you yourselves have made your protectors, your police. You've heard the Citizens' Defender say her client has refused to help her set up any kind of defense. Um. So, you'll leave the courtroom now and go and think about all that and reach your verdict. I know you'll do your duty. That's all I have to say."

The jury filed out the small side door, stood around in the afternoon sunshine and had a collective cigarette, filed in, and their foreman solemnly announced that they unanimously found David Tasker guilty of the robbery and murder of Leon Jacoby.

Brandt Cardozo had heard many juries deliver that awful verdict in the courtrooms of several planets. He had never seen anything like this. Now, in this bare room of raw boards that was designed as a Council Hall first and a courtroom second, there wasn't that long sigh shuddering over the audience as all concerned suddenly knew the tension was eased at last and the struggle for a man's life had ended in defeat.

There had been no tension. Eager curiosity, of course, for the spectators felt it was just as much their concern as the judge's, say, to discover how their brand-new laws would work. But there had been nothing to assail their nerves and their emotions, because nothing so tangible as death had been in the offing. Tasker's life or death had never been debated.

Brandt Cardozo glanced over at Tasker. The defendant leered at the jury. Open resentment of his contempt showed on the faces of some.

Hrdlicka muttered a "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen," rustled some papers, cleared his throat, and said, "Um. Well, we're on our own now. Lot of us had some experience with law—know I have with one kind of corporation code or another—so, up to now, we've known what to expect. But now . . . well, when we finally decided we were stuck on this world and had to make our own way, we decided we'd try some new ways of doing things. We're actually going to use one of those new methods right now. And while I'm not a particularly religious man, I say, 'God be with us.'" He looked musingly down at Tasker. The prisoner twiddled his thumbs. "The jury's decided the prisoner's guilty of murder. Only possible verdict, of course. Now, we're going to use our best brains to decide what to do with him . . . all right, I call on Dr. Pierre Malory."

"Well," breathed Malory, "here we go."

He walked over quickly and seated himself in the witness chair.

"Now, Doctor," Hrdlicka said, "I feel you should give your material as testimony. That is, subject to questioning from bench, counsel, or jury. I said, subject to *question*. Not challenge. Not debate." He flicked a sidelong glance at Hugo Blair. "No cross-examination. Only time we'll bother you is when you're usin' technical terms the rest of us don't follow. Now. Let's have your background. For the record."

"Yes, sir," Malory's voice was quietly purposeful. "I am Pierre Malory, Doctor of Medicine. I was a passenger on the S. & G. liner, the *Tonia*, when it crashed on this planet. Since I was the only medical man among the survivors, I have served as the community's physician. Six months ago, we adopted a penal code to take care of problems of law and order. That code called for the services of a psychiatrist and, since we had no better trained man, I was elected to the job."

"We've been lucky to have you, Doctor. Now, you have examined the prisoner, David Tasker?"

"I have."

"For how long?"

"Since the day of his arrest, six days ago."

"Know anything about him before that?"

"Not on the ship. He was, I believe, a member of the engine maintenance crew and I, as a passenger, would not come in contact with him. In the year we have been here in the New World, I have had little time to take any note of him. I did treat him once."

"What for, Doctor?"

"Facial contusions. I believe he had been in a fight."

"I see. Well, now, suppose you give us the result of your official observations."

Pierre Malory stretched out his long legs, crossed them, moved his body sideways in his chair.

"It's going to be a difficult job, sir. For three reasons."

"Go ahead. Let's have them."

"First. I am definitely not what I hope my successors will be: a fully qualified specialist in mental disease. You all know I'm just a general practitioner. Second. I haven't had the time or the equipment to make any sort of analysis of the emotions, personality, attitudes of David Tasker. Lord! even if I had all the instruments I could possibly want, plus a complete staff of trained personnel, I couldn't begin an analysis in six days! And thirdly, the prisoner is obviously under the influence of the drug, dakarine."

"Well, Doctor, as to your first two reasons," said Hrdlicka, "we all know how little equipment was salvaged. And we all know how many lives you've saved with it in the past year. We're not worried about your qualifications; this court will take what you say as gospel. There'll be no argument, believe me. But maybe you'd better tell us about this dakarine."

"Dakarine is, briefly, an alkaloid derived from the dakar plant which was discovered on Centauri III. That plant is now grown under government supervision on all Earth-type planets. When used in minute quantities, dakarine has produced marvelous results in the treatment of all types of psychic shock. That is, if it

is administered to a patient suffering anything from excessive grief to extreme catatonia, the patient's interest in the world about him is almost immediately restored to normal.

"However, the drug—like so many—has its dangers. It is habitforming. It produces in its addicts a cheerful conviction that everything the addict wants to do is quite all right. Nothing the addict attempts will ever go wrong—is wrong." Malory straightened in his chair, leaned forward. "The prisoner Tasker is obviously still under the influence of the drug. His lack of interest in his predicament is full proof of that. And I don't know how long the effects of the dose he took will last, for the effect of a given quantity of the drug varies with the individual. And I don't know how much dakarine Tasker took or what his personal reaction to it is. I do know that Tasker, being full of dakarine, is a man incapable of any sort of cooperation with a psychiatrist."

Tasker sat impassive under the concerted gaze of the entire room.

"Just how do you mean?" asked Hrdlicka.

"To appraise the mind, we first evaluate the body. Tasker's in wretched physical condition. But his symptoms can be nothing more than those of prolonged use of dakarine. They probably are.

"Now, as to his mind. Naturally, he refused to give me any response to tests. I think I've managed to make a pretty fair guess at his IQ—it's average. About eighty-one Andrews, I should say. Perhaps point eleven Herwig-Dollheim, but that's just a guess. Right now, his personality is, must be, wholly false. He's absolutely optimistic, crudely merry—to him everything's a joke, an obscene joke; he's completely self-righteous. He has no approach to problems because for David Tasker *there are no problems.*"

"It seems to me," Blair said coldly, "you don't give us much to go on."

"That is correct, Counselor. I haven't much to go on myself."

The jury glanced uneasily at each other. Hugo Blair tapped his table with a pen.

"Well, Doctor," Hrdlicka said, "what shall we do about it?"

"I don't think we can do anything until Tasker is completely free from the influence of the drug."

Blair jumped to his feet.

"I fail to see your reasoning," he snapped.

Malory was puzzled.

"I don't follow you," he said.

"I submit that, since Tasker was *not* under the influence of any drug when he committed the crime of murder, we have no right to take this business of drug addiction into our present consideration!"

Hrdlicka rapped his desk with his gavel.

"That's ridiculous, Counselor! The law calls for a thorough analysis of the accused; and even a layman like me can see that no analysis is possible if the accused is under the influence of any drug that affects his faculties. And I would like to point out to the entire court that the problem of murder has been settled. We're not concerned with that now, we're concerned with the problem of Tasker. Um. Dr. Malory, I'll take your suggestion for delay under advisement, unless you want me to act on it now?"

Malory hesitated, glanced quickly at Brandt Cardozo. Cardozo looked at Blair, still on his feet, and his mind raced. After a moment he made his decision. Settle it now, he said to himself, and shook his head very slightly.

"I rather think, Your Honor," Malory then said, "that you might hear Mr. Cardozo and then make your decision."

"Very well. Mr. Blair, I see you are still on your feet. Do you wish to address the court?"

"I wish to state that I, both as a citizen of this community and as an officer of this court, consider Dr. Malory's attempts at diagnosis wholly inadequate for the purposes of this trial!"

Hrdlicka opened his mouth, but Malory raised a hand.

"They are inadequate, sir," he said to Blair. His tone was gentle. "Perhaps I should give you my own feeling toward this man. My feeling—the feeling of a man who has practiced medicine for over twenty years—is that David Tasker is essentially a very unhappy person. He's inferior; all drug addicts feel inferior. He's frightened;

all belligerent persons are frightened. I hope someday to learn why he's unhappy . . . frightened . . . belligerent. I hope to learn that for my good, for your good, as well as for Tasker's good."

"I think we understand that," grunted Hrdlicka. "Anything further, Doctor?"

"I believe not."

"We'll call Mr. Cardozo . . . if Mr. Blair will yield the floor." Scowling, Blair sat down.

"Nice going," Cardozo whispered as he passed Malory on the way to the witness stand.

"Now, Mr. Cardozo," said Hrdlicka, "our penologist. Or warden. We don't have much of a prison for you now, eh? But, as we redevelop the complexites of civilization, I suppose we'll have plenty such. Um. Now, suppose you tell us just how you follow up Dr. Malory's work."

"Essentially, I investigate any accused as a social, rather than a psychiatric, case. And I try to combine Dr. Malory's findings with the limitations of the situation and set up means for rehabilitation."

"I see. You've an eye to the defendant's future, rather than to his past?"

"That's very well put, Your Honor."

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, for once we have a real expert to help us. Mr. Cardozo was a penologist by profession, associate warden at the maximum-security institution on Pluto. So, while we've been going by-guess-and-by-God so far, now we've got a gentleman who knows what he's talking about."

"Your Honor!" It was Blair again.

"Now what is it, Mr. Blair?"

"I'd like to ask the penologist one question."

"Is it relevant, Mr. Blair?"

"I think it is."

"All right, all right." The old man looked very weary.

Blair hustled up to the stand. Even seated, Brandt Cardozo was a head taller than the little man. "You and I were conversing in the bachelor lounge of the *Tonia* when it crashed," Blair rapped out.

"Did you or did you not say to me at that time that you did not believe in prisons?"

Hrdlicka leaned over his desk so suddenly his glasses slid down over his nose again.

"Counselor!" he roared. "A conversation out of the past has nothing to do with this trial! You know that! Now, sit down before I order you to leave the court!"

"Your Honor," said Brandt Cardozo, "I've no objection to answering that question . . . if Mr. Blair will let me finish my sentence, this time." He gazed tranquilly at the flushed counsel. "When you interrupted me back on the *Tonia*, sir, I recollect that I was about to say this: I do not approve of prisons as institutions for punishment. I most firmly believe in them as a means toward rehabilitation—if they are so devised."

"That's enough," rumbled Hrdlicka. "Mr. Blair knows the thinking behind our law and what's more, he knows you're a leading exponent of that thinking."

"Yes," sneered Blair, "we all know how bitterly Mr. Cardozo was opposed to capital punishment."

There are your fangs, thought Cardozo, bared at last.

"Sit down, Mr. Blair." Hrdlicka's voice was suddenly quiet.

Blair sat down, a smirk on his gnome's face.

"Now," Hrdlicka was not his usual rumbling self, "what's your advice to this court, Mr. Cardozo?"

Brandt Cardozo sat relaxed in his chair, a rangy, big-shouldered man with a boyishly cheerful face.

"Sometime, sir," he said, "we'll have a large staff of penal experts. It will be a fairly simple job for the penologist to take the psychiatrist's findings, correlate them with those of his own staff, and be able to make a very accurate recommendation to the court. The penologist can set up a long-range program for the prisoner, defining exactly what is needed in the way of special training or treatment, medical care, minimum security confinement, maximum security . . ."

"Your Honor, I must ask your indulgence once more." Blair rushed on before Hrdlicka could stop him. "Mr. Cardozo, you used

the expression 'maximum security.' Are we to presume you admit the need for such an institution?"

"Certainly. I'm afraid we'll need one for Tasker. For a while, at least. Any penologist, or criminologist if you prefer, will admit that we can't rehabilitate certain men and women. In other words, they're incurable. We get to them too late to help. To protect ourselves we must keep those persons locked up. And watch them pretty closely. Of course, we must try to make their confinement useful—useful to them and to society."

"Thank you," said Blair.

"Go on, Mr. Cardozo," said Hrdlicka.

"Your Honor, I can't get any help from Tasker either. I have talked to survivors of the crew about him. Of course, I must regard much of their talk as gossip. They think Tasker's papers were forged; they say he was lazy, a careless worker, a troublemaker. They think Tasker has a criminal record. I'd say he probably has. At any rate, I'm going to regard him as such until both Dr. Malory and I can accumulate more detailed and accurate information about the man."

"Um. So what do we do with him?"

Brandt Cardozo felt the uneasy gaze of the audience on his back. He looked at the jury. They were frowning, worried.

"Well, sir, here's where we, as a society, meet our first challenge. A well-liked and most useful member of our community has been killed by a man whose worth to us is pretty dubious." Brandt Cardozo straightened his big shoulders. "We have decided we won't take the easy answer to such a problem—we won't shrug off the burden by killing the killer. Let's meet the challenge, then. First of all, hospitalize Tasker, under guard, of course, until Dr. Malory is satisfied Tasker's free of all dakarine effects. Then, let Dr. Malory work on him; I'm confident the doctor can very soon—once the man is his normal self—decide how to order his confinement so Tasker will have every chance for readjustment. There was a method of sentencing the mentally irresponsible in the System; such persons were detained during the pleasure of the court.

"I think you can do the same. Simply order David Tasker to be

detained during the pleasure of this court—in the custody of the proper authorities. I would further suggest that you provide for periodic examinations of the prisoner by yourself, assisted by such citizens as you deem necessary—Mr. Blair, Miss Giovannetti—to determine any future disposal of his case. Eventually we can decide whether we can hope for rehabilitation or settle for perpetual confinement.”

“Well . . . that makes very good sense to me. You may step down, Mr. Cardozo, and thank you.”

Hrdlicka propped his elbows on his desk and rested his chin in his cupped hands. He stared somberly at the crowded room.

“The court’s going to follow Mr. Cardozo’s program,” he rumbled. “But before I make it official, I’d like to say one or two things to all of you, as people of this planet we call the New World. I was on the committee that drew up our civil and criminal codes. I agreed to all the ideas that people like Mr. Cardozo wanted to incorporate into the laws. Voted for them. But I wasn’t sure they’d work. I’m an old man and I guess my years have made me cynical. I thought if the pressure was on us, if ever, we’d all take the easy way out. Well, we haven’t. I’m glad. Speaks damn well for our future.”

He raised his head and dropped his hands flat on the desk.

“If it’s agreeable to all concerned, I’ll sentence the convicted defendant. Any objections, Miss Giovannetti?”

“Your Honor—I—I’m awfully proud . . . I think this court has done a great thing today . . .”

“Think so, too. D’ye agree, Mr. Blair? Oh . . . I see you’ve got something to say. Well, go ahead.”

Hugo Blair had darted to his feet and stepped a pace away from his chair, so the spectators’ view of him would not be blocked by his table.

“Trouble, Brandt,” whispered Malory.

“I don’t think so. Hrdlicka will handle him.”

“Your Honor,” rasped Blair, “I am an officer of this court.”

“So?”

"That means, sir, that I am obliged to speak out when this court fails to serve the interests of the people!"

"Yes, yes. Come to the point!"

Blair turned a little to one side so that, while seeming to face the bench, as was proper, he could still glance out at the spectators. He clasped his hands behind his back and thrust out his big head.

"Mr. Cardozo has beguiled a charitable people into decreeing that there shall be no capital punishment," he cried. "But I must ask you, all of you, what will you have in its stead?" He pointed at the grinning Tasker. "There sits our declared enemy. You have heard him pronounced a drug addict, a habitual criminal. He has already killed one of us. How many more of us will he slaughter whenever he gets bored with our coddling of him?"

"Blair!" roared Hrdlicka. He banged his gavel. "Sit down!" He raised his bulk half out of his chair. "I don't know what you're getting at, but we'll have no ranting by counsel in this court!"

"Ranting, sir? Is it ranting to ask that we stop and observe where the impractical schemes of weak men may lead us?"

"You're in contempt of this court, Counselor. That doesn't mean much—to me. But you're in contempt of the laws of your country and I won't stand for that!"

"Is it contempt to challenge a law that does not protect?"

"Ah, Judge, Your Honor . . ." the foreman of the jury, a sandy-haired, nervous man, raised a thin arm. "I think we have a right to ask Mr. Blair to tell us what he means."

"That's torn it," breathed Malory.

"If that blasted Tasker only realized what was happening to him," Cardozo groaned.

"Very well," growled Hrdlicka. "I'll let you answer the jury, Counselor."

"Thank you, sir." Blair's bow was generally in the jury's direction. "I'll be brief. Mr. Cardozo and Dr. Malory have given us some pretty generalities. Oh, they were sincere. I'm sure of that. But their words were generalities. I, on the other hand, am concerned solely with one, individual matter. The matter of David Tasker—murderer!"

"Mr. Hrdlickal" Cardozo cried. "I object to that . . ."

"I will correct myself," Blair said smoothly. "Let me say that you are not concerned *solely* with the problem of David Tasker. But I am. For, you see, I wish to live in peace. And safety."

Blair paused, smiled thinly.

"Quiet, boy," murmured the doctor. "Don't argue with him."

"So I will confine myself to the problem of David Tasker," Blair went on. "Now, Mr. Cardozo has said that we should keep him in a sort of perpetual custody. A kindly procedure, but isn't it a bit impractical?" He was speaking directly to the audience now. "I trust that Dr. Malory will agree that he can't spend all his time with one patient. And you'll agree that you, yourself, can't personally guard one lone prisoner day and night, won't you, Mr. Cardozo? After all, we each of us have many different jobs that must be done if this community is to survive. Now, we don't have a prison as yet. Shall we stop all other building—hospital, school, sanitation system—to erect a jail for one worthless man?"

"Are you through?" Hrdlicka asked.

"Just one or two queries more. We have a very small policing force, because most of us are orderly men. So, if we follow the advice of our friends here, we, all of us, men, women—even the few children left to us—must always be on our guard to see that this *enemy* of ours doesn't break free from our weak restraint and, in his mad lust for his filthy drug, kill any of us in his way!"

Brandt Cardozo heard a confused muttering behind him. He turned. The spectators moved restlessly, huddling together, whispering. Some were staring at Tasker and their faces weren't pleasant to see. Cardozo arose.

"Your Honor," he said quietly, "I seem to be the principal target of Mr. Blair's wrath. May I remind him that I am acting according to law—the law he himself is sworn to uphold."

"Not necessarily. Mr. Blair doesn't have much regard for law. A matter I'll take up with the Council. Now, Blair, you've done a neat job of stirring us up, so sit down and be quiet."

The muttering among the spectators grew louder.

"There'll be order in this court!" roared Hrdlicka.

He waited.

The muttering did not subside.

The jury foreman coughed.

"Seems to us, the jury, that is," he was embarrassed but stubborn, "there's a lot in what he says. We ain't blaming Mr. Cardozo any—but, well, I guess we don't see how that—the prisoner can be kept locked up so that the rest of us are safe."

"That's our problem!" snapped Cardozo. "We've got to face it! And I, for one, am ready to face it! Your Honor, I wish to go on public record that I assume full responsibility for Tasker's safe custody."

"Very commendable," sneered Blair. "And after Tasker's next killing, you will send us your regrets, Mr. Cardozo?"

Someone in the back of the room stumbled to his feet and cried, "Now, look . . ."

"Silence!" roared Hrdlicka.

For the moment they all obeyed him.

"Now," said the old man, "this is your court and I'm your judge. We're here to carry out your laws. *Your* laws, remember! So let's get on with it. And no more nonsense!"

"Is it nonsense to want to protect ourselves?" cried Blair.

No muttering now, but a loud chorus of agreement.

"Look, Judge," said the foreman of the jury. The hubbub died down. "I don't know how to say it legal, but the jury thinks that, well, Tasker ought to be kicked out. And . . ." he fumbled and the juror next to him plucked his sleeve. They whispered together. "Yeah. And we want it on record that we think so." He sat down.

"But that won't do," purred Hugo Blair. "Really it won't. Suppose we do exile this fellow. Then what? Out in the hills he lurks—mad, hungry—more desperate than ever. We, in our valley, must patrol our homes both day and night. Yet, in the darkness, our few sentries will be easy enough to evade. So, we bar our doors and windows. Children are kept close to home. We huddle together. We are afraid . . . afraid of one man."

And someone in the back of the room yelled, "So kill the son of a bitch!"

Blair smiled.

Hrdlicka rose to his feet and stood, a massive, brooding figure.

"Mr. Blair," he rumbled, "I have mentioned before I am going to report your conduct to the Council. That's all I have to say to you." He looked contemptuously at the jury. "Long ago we decided that we were going to settle down on this planet and live ordered lives. Which means you can't cook up laws on the spur of the moment. You already have laws on your statute books. Those laws provide penalties for this prisoner and I am going to impose them now! David Tasker, stand up!"

Which was a mistake, Brandt Cardozo realized that immediately. The shambling figure of Tasker gave them a focus, a personification for their fear.

Some of them yelled. Hrdlicka beat on his desk with his gavel, but it was no use. Finally, somebody—probably the man who had first cried "Kill!"—started down the aisle. As Brandt Cardozo moved out to block the man, he caught a glimpse of Hugo Blair. Blair was staring at the running man and, to Cardozo's surprise, the little man was no longer smiling.

As the fellow burst among them, Cardozo reached out for him, but the other brushed on by. "Come on!" the man screamed at Blair, "Let's get him now."

Blair's eyes bulged under his shaggy brows and he faltered a step backward.

"Guard!" bellowed Hrdlicka. "Arrest that man!"

Lisa Giovannetti stumbled out of her chair. The man tried to avoid her, bumped into her, and knocked her to the floor. The man stopped and looked down at her.

Cardozo saw that Blair was trembling.

"Is this what you wanted, Mr. Blair?" he asked softly.

Lisa Giovannetti tried—not very hard—to get up.

Brandt Cardozo moved swiftly over to the man, grabbed his arm, and swung him around. "Get out of here," Cardozo said clearly but not loudly, "or I'll knock you down."

The other looked at Cardozo, then down at Lisa Giovannetti.

He jerked his arm free and stumbled up the aisle. People moved out of his way. Cardozo helped Lisa Giovannetti to her feet.

"Nice going," he whispered, then in normal tones he asked, "Are you hurt?"

"No . . . just awfully scared."

Brandt Cardozo looked up at Hrdlicka. The old man stood, shoulders sagging. He looked very tired.

"Your Honor," Cardozo said, "we all seem to have forgotten ourselves. I respectfully suggest you adjourn this court until we . . ."

"Until we stop acting like silly, hysterical children?" Hrdlicka rasped. "I agree. I'm ashamed. Deeply ashamed. I—never mind, court's adjourned."

There was shuffling of feet, a few started out, but most of them didn't move. They stood, uneasy, watching Hugo Blair.

The little man had recovered his poise.

"I agree with Your Honor that violence will not solve the questions raised by this trial," he said. "But I am sure that an immediate, *public* session of the Council will."

He stalked up the aisle and the people followed him, clustering close, jabbering, nodding their heads. Hrdlicka watched them as the room slowly cleared.

"All right," he said at last. "Guard, take the prisoner back to his cell. By the side door."

Pierre Malory sighed. Hrdlicka stepped ponderously off his crude platform and joined the little group.

"Well, lads," he smiled without mirth at Cardozo and Malory, "there goes your fancy, progressive penal code. No capital punishment, eh?" He gestured toward Lisa Giovannetti. "One of you had better take this girl home."

"No," she said. "I'm quite all right. Really. I wasn't a bit hurt, you know."

"But you lay there—well, I'll be damned!" He beamed at her.

"She's a smart girl," grinned Cardozo. "Her little act stopped the lynching, Anthony."

"What's going to happen now?" asked the girl.

"Oh," said Hrdlicka, "that little bastard Blair will get what he wants. He'll make his point in Council just like he did today. Better get ready for a full-dress execution, Brandt, my boy."

"What has he got against you, Brandt?" asked Lisa Giovannetti. "He—he was positively venomous toward you."

"It's not me he hates," said Brandt Cardozo. "It's what I stand for."

"But they won't listen to him—they won't kill Tasker!"

"Sure they will," Cardozo nodded. "History bears him out. You see, primitive man couldn't run the risk of keeping his criminals alive—"

"But we're not primitive!"

"We've reverted. Under the excuse of necessity, of course. We just haven't got the facilities, you see. Perhaps later, when everything is lovely a few years from now. Ha! We'll never take the first step. There'll always be a Blair around to point out the difficulties . . . *and* the daggers."

They started for the door, walking slowly. Hrdlicka put a hand on Cardozo's shoulder.

"If you live as long as I have, Brandt, you'll just about lose all faith in human beings. They'll cause you nothing but grief." He patted the younger man's shoulder. "Blair . . . wish I knew what makes the little bastard tick."

"Oh," replied Cardozo, "that's simple. I found that out during the debates on our constitution and laws. It's fear. He doesn't like or trust his fellow man, so he's afraid of him."

Anthony Hrdlicka walked slowly down the dim street of the village, headed toward the river. The old man's shoulders were bowed and he puffed jerkily at the cigar clenched between his teeth. One of the planet's two little moons was already high in the sky, shining bravely among constellations uncharted, unknown. Hrdlicka picked his way easily enough along the pebbled path that took over when the street ended.

He passed the towering hulk of the *Tonia*. It was empty now and would stay where it had rammed into the alien soil, a leaning

tower of gleaming alloy. As time passed, its former passengers would cut away its metal as they needed it and, unless they found usable ores, one day there would be nothing left of the *Tonia* but a tribal memory.

The path ended at the crude wharf they had built at the river's edge. Hrdlicka walked past a storage shed to the edge of the wharf, sat down and swung his legs over the edge. There he sat, chin in hands, elbows on knees, and stared somberly at the quiet water.

After a while he muttered, "Damn fools!"

The Council had met that afternoon. The old man grinned briefly at the memory of the battle he and Brandt Cardozo had waged before the final vote had beaten them down. Cardozo, he thought, was a damn good man . . . he would have been a great help to Hrdlicka back . . . back in those great days that would never come again. Why, and the old man's eyes lighted up as he remembered, there was that time he'd had the big fight with the government over the ownership of certain mines in Sirius III. He could have used a man like Cardozo in that deal—except Cardozo, the young romantic, would have been on the government's side. Which was all right, too, the USN lads had been a bunch of bright, tough-minded kids. Not like today's hysterical sheep, blatting after Hugo Blair . . .

He scowled at the gurgling water.

And felt a brief, sharp pain under his left shoulder. Hrdlicka waited and the pain went away. He knew it would come again and again. After all, he was seventy-three. And one day they'd dig another hole in the little cemetery where most of the crew and officers of the *Tonia* now rested and . . . what would he be leaving?

He was a little surprised at himself. That he should be concerned with the brave new laws of a huddle of castaways when he had, well, not broken but certainly evaded the laws of a confederation of sixteen planets! And why should he, Anthony Hrdlicka, be worked up over the coming death of a miserable wretch who was no good to anyone? Hrdlicka's cigar had gone out, but he still puffed at it. With his usual harsh realism he began to examine the situation and himself.

There was a scuffling sound behind him and he turned, alert and wary. This planet had evidenced no intelligent life—yet. A tall figure moved cautiously out of the shadows of the shed. Hrdlicka heard the mutter of a voice and called out, “Who’s there?”

The tall shadow moved closer, then spoke. “Is that Hrdlicka?”

“Yes.” He squinted, then grinned broadly. “Why, it’s Brandt! Welcome to the mourner’s bench, lad!”

Brandt Cardozo moved nearer. Hrdlicka saw that he was frowning.

“What are you doing here?” Cardozo said.

“Came down to get away from a bunch of goddam fools. Come on, boy, sit down and have a smoke. You know, we better find some kind of tobacco weed on this place or there’s going to be a lot of nervous wrecks soon. I’m down to my last case of cigars myself.”

“No. No, thanks.” Cardozo walked to the edge of the wharf and looked quickly up and down the river. “Have you seen anyone around here?” he asked.

“No. Why?”

“Ah, never mind.” Cardozo paused, then, still not looking at Hrdlicka, said, “You plan to be here much longer? It’s—it’s getting cool, you know.”

Hrdlicka peered up at him.

“What’s on your mind, son?” he asked quietly. Cardozo did not answer. Hrdlicka snapped his fingers. “I know! *I’m* the goddam fool! You’re worryin’ about the execution.”

“There’ll be no execution.”

“Eh? What did you say?”

“I said, there will be no execution!”

Hrdlicka scrunched backward until his feet were on the wharf. Then, with considerable grunting, he hauled himself erect. He stood, hands on hips, staring at Brandt Cardozo. He took the cold cigar from his mouth and tossed it into the river.

“You’d better explain yourself.”

Brandt Cardozo still looked out at the river.

“There’ll be no execution because I won’t stand for it. You

might as well know I've got Tasker over there in the shed. I'm taking him down the river on a cotton-weed raft."

"Well . . . I'll be—"

Brandt Cardozo half turned and gazed steadily at the old man.

"There's no use arguing," he said coldly.

"I'm not going to argue. I assume you know what you're doing."

"I do. I know that these people," he jerked a hand back toward the sleeping village, "took a look at their future and made one of the best codes man has ever dreamed up in his nine-thousand-year history. Today, these same people got scared—and the ape scampered back up the tree."

"You know," Hrdlicka grunted, "sometimes I think you make too many speeches."

"Could be." Cardozo took a step toward the shed. "Better get out of here, Anthony. There'll be hell to pay in the morning. And when our Mr. Blair gets his mob organized, you'll be the first one he goes after. I don't want you bothered for my . . . crimes."

"You're really leaving?"

"Certainly. I've got to stick with the poor devil until the drug wears off. And anyway . . ." Brandt Cardozo shrugged and took another step toward the shed.

"In my time," Hrdlicka said, moving with him, "I got a lot of things done. And I got them done by cutting my losses sometimes and starting in all over again."

"Please get going, Anthony. I must be on my way and I don't want to get rough with you."

"Is it that you can't take the idea of—of—well, executing the fellow?"

"Look, my friend!" Cardozo grabbed Hrdlicka by an arm and swung him around. They faced each other. "The first warden of the Pluto house hated executions. Whenever he could, he'd pass the dirty business on to me, as the next in rank. In my time I've supervised the legal killing of some thirty men and two women. Now, leave or stay, whichever you like, but don't interfere."

He stalked over to the shed.

"Come on out, Tasker," Brandt Cardozo said. "And keep it quiet."

Hrdlicka opened his mouth, closed it, and walked away. Tasker slouched out of the shed, bundles in his arms. Brandt Cardozo stood still, listening to the sound of Hrdlicka's feet on the rough planks of the platform. He waited until the sound changed as Hrdlicka reached the pebbled path. Then he walked into the shed and picked up another bundle. When he came out, Tasker stood at the edge of the landing, grinning.

"We'll take the downstream raft," Cardozo said. "Jump aboard and I'll hand the stuff down to you."

Tasker squatted and looked down.

"It's a big jump, pal. Better give me a hand."

"All right, but hurry!"

"No hurry, chum. We got all the time in the world."

Brandt Cardozo stopped, his arm half extended to the condemned man.

"Don't you really know what we're doing?" he asked softly.

"You said we was making a break. You seem to be taking it okay. So what?"

"But don't you know why, really?"

Tasker shrugged.

"You're a queer boy," he said. "One minute you say rush it, the next you stop to do a lot of gabbing. Okay by me. Whatever you want."

"Never mind," Brandt Cardozo sighed. "Give me your hand."

They clasped hands and Tasker swung his legs out over the bobbing raft. Cardozo braced, Tasker let go with his other hand and landed on the raft. Cardozo let go and saw Tasker sway, then spread his feet wide apart. In a moment Tasker had his balance and stood secure on the wobbly raft.

Brandt Cardozo picked up a bundle. He had gathered together as few essentials as possible, a rough first-aid kit, some food concentrates, a few extra clothes. He himself was armed with a handgun and two knives. Later, when the man was more his normal

self, Cardozo planned to give Tasker a knife. He had not looked into the future beyond that.

Cardozo tossed one bundle down, Tasker caught it, dropped it in the center of the raft. Another bundle was passed.

"Lay them carefully, damn it!" Cardozo snapped.

"Okay, okay."

Cardozo had picked up the last bundle when he heard a voice call softly, "Brandt! Oh, Brandt!"

He let go the bundle and drew his gun. A man came toward him across the landing and he saw it was Pierre Malory. Brandt Cardozo did not lower his gun.

"Take it easy, Malory," he said.

Malory came closer. He was smiling.

"I'm alone, Brandt. I don't plan to start anything, so you can put the gun away."

Brandt Cardozo did not move.

"Hrdlicka came to me," Malory went on in a conversational tone. "When he told me your plan, I thought I'd come along and say goodbye." He glanced down at the raft. "Ah, Tasker. How are you feeling?"

"Fine. How else?"

"You won't feel that way much longer, I think. Brandt, I don't believe you know the symptoms of withdrawal. Morbid depression accompanied by extreme fatigue. He won't be much good to you for some time. For just how long, I don't know."

"Please go," Brandt Cardozo said flatly.

"Very well. But I did want to say goodbye, Brandt, and wish you luck."

"Psychology, eh!"

"Not at all. It would do you no good. When the thoughtful, contemplative type, like you, finally breaks into violent action, nothing can stop it during the period of such action."

"I'm glad you realize that. Here you go, Tasker."

Gun still in his right hand, he picked up the last bundle and tossed it down to the waiting Tasker. Then he went over to the mooring chain.

"Hell! I forgot this was locked!" He hesitated a moment, fidgeting the chain, then turned to look at Malory. "I'm going to burn this lock, Pierre. If you try anything, I'll . . ."

"I won't try anything!" Malory sounded exasperated. "Go ahead, burn the lock. But don't get so wound up that you forget your manners. Hrdlicka was hurt that you had no word for him. That tough old man is very fond of you, Brandt."

"He left before I—oh, the devil with it! Tell the old guy cheerio for me, Pierre. You too, guy."

"I will. Mind telling me your plans?"

When Cardozo hesitated, Malory smiled and said, "I'll tell them to Hugo Blair first thing in the morning!"

"I'm sorry. We'll just float down the river as far as we want to, I guess. Then, fish and hunt, live as best we can. I don't think anyone will chase us. It's the cotton season and they'll need the other raft. We should learn something about this planet, eh?"

"Let me know when you guys finish your gab," Tasker remarked and sat down on the logs of the raft.

"Shut up, you!" Cardozo barked.

He turned back to Malory. "You don't approve," he challenged.

"It's not that," Malory said thoughtfully. "It's something like watching another doctor treat a patient. His treatment is not what I, myself, would prescribe but, on the other hand, I realize it may work. So, it's not for me to say anything."

"I'm not treating anyone!"

"Oh." Malory thrust his hands in his pockets and gazed down at the planks. "I thought you were," he said after a while.

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I thought you were treating our community. For hysteria."

"To hell with our community! I'm saving a man's life!"

"Hrdlicka was right, then. You know, I'm convinced that old gentleman is *never* wrong. Well, cheerio."

Hands still in his pockets, Pierre Malory turned his back to Cardozo.

"Wait!" Brandt Cardozo cried.

Malory paused, looked over his shoulder.

"You'd better move, Brandt. The night's getting on."

"Tell me what you mean first!"

"It's simple enough. This town's temporarily sick. I'd diagnose its ailment as an acute case of Blair poisoning. Isn't it up to you to give it an antidote?"

"Up to me! I'm finished with that bunch of idiots! You heard them at the Council meeting!"

"I did. There were some extremists, of course."

"Yes, indeed there were! And how about the others. I suppose you approve of them?"

"I don't. Their behavior was abnormal. It was also fairly orderly. And quite legal."

"Legal? My dear doctor, do you consider it legal to sentence a man to death under an *ex post facto* law?"

"You have me there, Brandt. Yet . . . don't forget this is a frontier, and frontier people seldom bother to make the effort our community made today. Legally, Tasker can't die and you and I know it. But a majority of the people have condemned him, so die he must."

"Majority! A bunch of frantic cows mooing after a mad bull!"

"You're shouting, Brandt."

"I'm—sorry."

Brandt Cardozo drew a deep breath. He looked down at his hands. They were shaking and sweaty. He was surprised to see that he still held his gun. He quickly thrust it into his holster.

"I apologize, Pierre. Thought I'd done all my shouting this afternoon."

A loud snore came up from the raft.

Brandt Cardozo gasped, then ran back and looked over the wharf's edge.

"Christ!" he breathed. "He's asleep! Tasker's gone to sleep, Pierre!"

"Why not? Right now Tasker is incapable of worry."

They were quiet for a moment. The rhythmic snoring sounded over the soft murmur of the river.

"You'd better get going," Malory said. "Somebody just might

hear that." He took a step. "Oh. By the way, Brandt. You did leave a message for the Council? Your resignation, that sort of thing?"

"No, I did not!" Brandt Cardozo said defiantly. "I owe them nothing! I'm leaving them—I'm going to save Tasker's life and be damned to them!"

"Very well. I shall make whatever explanations I see fit."

"When? To whom?"

"Tomorrow morning. To Blair, most likely. He'll take over completely, for Hrdlicka and I—as your supporters—will be discredited, of course. And strongly suspected of helping Tasker escape. Ah, well . . . Anthony can handle his problems and I'll try to manage mine."

"You think I'm letting you down," Cardozo muttered.

"My dear fellow, it doesn't matter what I think."

Brandt Cardozo licked his sweaty lips.

"Don't go," he said thickly.

"Why not?"

"I want you to help me get Tasker back to his cell. Will you?"

"Why?"

"I'm not sure . . ."

"It's no good if you're just doing it for Hrdlicka or for me. Or for yourself."

"Well, who the hell else would I do it for!"

Malory gestured briefly.

"For all of us."

"For Tasker, too?"

"I'm sorry—terribly sorry, but Tasker doesn't matter any more. Really he doesn't, Brandt."

"Damn it, Pierre . . . all right, you're my doctor. Help me."

Pierre Malory searched his pockets for a cigarette, found one, and lit it. He smoked slowly as a man does who smokes solely for taste and not for nervous sustenance.

Finally he said, "I honestly can't help you, Brandt. You are the doer now."

"Blast it!" Cardozo strode to the edge and frowned down at the

snoring Tasker. "I was doing something. Doing it for Tasker."

"No."

"Eh?"

"You were doing it for none other than Brandt Cardozo. The emotional, embittered, Brandt Cardozo."

"Now, look—oh. I see . . ."

"Tasker was Blair's scapegoat. Tasker was Brandt Cardozo's excuse."

"For acting the fool!"

"Not precisely the fool. Put it in reverse. Tasker was your excuse for *not* acting as Brandt Cardozo, the penologist, the responsible servant of the people of the New World."

"I tried that. And lost."

"Well, then, cut your losses."

"The old man said that. I don't know . . . I don't believe in capital punishment, Pierre. It just doesn't do any good. I told the people that. And they listened—until that damned Blair . . ."

"Tell them again."

"A voice crying in the wilderness? Not me."

"That's the voice that won't rephrase its message. Tell the people in another way."

"Another way? What do you mean?"

"I am treating a patient. Sometimes I soothe him. Sometimes I reason with him. And once in a while I bawl the hell out of him! But all the time I am saying the same thing to him. Over and over. In different ways."

Brandt Cardozo stood for a time, looking down at the raft where Tasker lay sprawled on his back. After a while he nodded.

"Ever see an execution, Pierre?" Cardozo's voice was very cold.

"No."

"You will. Now—please help me get Tasker back to his cell."

"Certainly." Malory looked curiously at his friend. "What are you going to do now, Brandt?"

"I'm going to treat my sick community, Dr. Malory. This time, I'm going to try shock treatment. . . ."

The four-man procession clumped stolidly across the floor of the warehouse, reached the big door that led to the loading yard, and stopped.

"Open the door, Vanni," Brandt Cardozo ordered.

Tasker's cell had been a small room in the warehouse, the one permanent structure they had completed. Vanni, a stocky machinist's mate, stepped from where he stood by the bound Tasker, swung a clumsy lockbar out of its slot, and pushed the heavy door open.

The four men moved out into the loading yard. Their pace faltered.

"What's the matter?" Cardozo growled. "Keep it moving. Fast!"

"Uh . . . that it?" mumbled the other guard, McCann, a one-time video scensetter. His narrow shoulders shook a little.

"That's it. And the sooner we get there, the sooner it will be over."

At the far end of the yard stood a bark-covered, newly sawed post about eight feet high. Ten feet from it stood five men, four with flame rifles. The fifth, medical bag in hand, was Dr. Malory. Several yards behind them, in four ragged rows, stood some fifty-odd members of the community.

As they marched to the post, Brandt Cardozo checked the silent witnesses. Hrdlicka stood calm—by Cardozo's request in the first row—the sandy-haired jury foreman beside him. Arrayed on either side of those two were members of the jury and at the extreme end of the line, away from the post, stood Lisa Giovannetti.

At that moment an unidentified man slipped furtively into the first row and stood, eager eyes flickering from Tasker to the post and back again. Brandt Cardozo sighed. There was always at least one of those. . . . Always a twisted sadist, savoring another human being's terror and death.

He shrugged. Perhaps even that would help. Make it even worse for the others.

For this was his shock treatment . . . a *public* execution.

After the Council had revoked the law forbidding the death penalty and instituted capital punishment, it had hurriedly decreed that all details of an execution be left to the discretion of the penologist.

So Brandt Cardozo had ordered that all officials of the sentencing court should be present at any execution . . . as well as no less than 35 members of the public. He further stipulated that any other adult resident of the community could attend if he or she so desired.

Cardozo checked them off in his mind . . . no women . . . a good sign. He scowled suddenly.

"Halt!" he barked.

Tasker's escort stopped. They were very near the post. Cardozo strode over and ranged himself in front of the witnesses. "Where's Citizens' Counsel Blair?" he snapped.

Heads turned. There were a few whispers. Feet shuffled. The whispering grew into an audible murmur.

"I requested all court officers to be assembled at least twenty minutes before the time for execution."

"Um. Blair doesn't seem to be present," Hrdlicka murmured.

Cardozo forced all expression from his voice. "The Citizens' Counsel cannot evade the responsibilities of his office. Nor will this execution proceed without him."

He turned toward the firing squad.

"Grover!" he called. A rifleman left the line and trotted up to him.

"Yes, sir?"

"Go out in the town, locate Counselor Blair, bring him here. On the double! You are to use force if necessary."

Grover saluted and ran off.

Brandt Cardozo turned back and stared hard at the witnesses. It was apparent that the resentment on their faces was not toward him. But . . . it couldn't matter, now.

"I am sorry," he told them formally. "The execution of David Tasker, if it proceeds according to law, must be delayed for a few moments."

He turned his back on them and walked stiffly over to the little cluster of men that was the condemned and his killers.

Tasker jerked his head up and looked about him. Then he seemed to notice, for the first time, that his arms were bound.

"Hey!" His voice was uncertain, worried. "What's going on here?"

Malory cleared his throat.

"What's going on, I said!"

"You are about to die by shooting for the murder of Leon Jacoby," Cardozo said quietly. "If you can understand spiritual counsel, Tasker, ask for it now. As soon as Citizens' Counsel Blair gets here, I'll read you the death warrant and—"

"Death warrant!"

Tasker screamed.

Then he struggled so violently that, for a moment, he broke loose from Vanni's grip. Dragging McCann with him, he staggered toward Cardozo.

"You said . . ." he screamed. "You said—they wasn't gonna be no pill-box—no gas!"

Malory moved, but Vanni was faster. The guard regained his grip on Tasker's writhing arm and helped McCann pull the twisting, gasping killer to a stop.

"Take it easy, Dave," Vanni panted. "This is no good, fella—"

"Don't kill me!" Tasker babbled. "You said they was no killings—I remember—the girl told me—now, please, please—get my mouthpiece, I gotta right to an appeal—it's against the law—"

"I told you yesterday that the law had been changed. Made retroactive . . . not that you know what that big word means. I told you there was no hope, Tasker."

"I was doped. Oh, my God . . ."

"Jesus Christ," muttered McCann.

"It won't hurt, Dave," soothed Vanni. His voice lacked conviction.

"Please, please—Vanni—we was pals on the ship—"

Hrdlicka stepped forward from his line.

"Brandt! Can't you do something?"

McCann and Vanni were now wrestling with the screaming Tasker. Despite his bound arms, the condemned was battling furiously, hunching his shoulders and lunging bull-like in every direction. Tossing appearances to the winds, Vanni climbed on Tasker's back and tried to put on a half-nelson. But Tasker still screamed.

Cardozo bowed to Hrdlicka.

"Prisoners sometimes become violently hysterical when death gets this close to them, Your Honor," he said politely.

"It's more than that!" snapped Malory. "The dakarine has worn off, Brandt!"

"You've got to do something!" Hrdlicka cried, his heavy rumble gone. "This—this is dreadful!"

"I don't wanna die!" With a mighty frenzy, Tasker threw off Vanni, wrenched free from McCann, flung himself on the ground before Cardozo. "Please," he began to crawl, "you got no right—I shouldn't have to die—I been a sick man—*please!*"

"Do something, for Christ's sake!" McCann screamed suddenly.

"I've been afraid of this," Malory said, his quiet voice strangely sedate, "I have a narcotic, if the penologist permits . . ."

Cardozo stared down at the groveling Tasker. Now—it was really quite true—the poor wretch was no more than a symbol, a postulate in an argument.

He nodded his head.

The guards hauled Tasker to his feet and managed to hold him quiet while Dr. Malory administered a hypodermic. Tasker sighed, then went limp. His head bobbed, then his whole body leaned forward a little as the two guards held him upright.

Cardozo felt, rather than heard a gusty sigh of relief from the witnesses.

At that moment Blair trotted in, Grover a pace behind him, his rifle aimed at Blair's back.

"What's the meaning of this?" cried the little man. He pranced up to Brandt Cardozo. "I shall report this outrage! This man broke into my room—menaced me with a gun—"

"Mr. Blair! Lower your voice, please. You are in the presence of a man about to die."

"Uh—yes. Sorry. But—"

"Mr. Blair, you were required by law to attend this execution. Your tardiness has distressed everyone. Now, please take your proper place among the witnesses so that we can get this business over with."

"I was indisposed!" Blair bridled. "And further, sir, I will not be driven about at gunpoint." He saw the slumping Tasker. "What's he doing? More dramatics?"

Cardozo waited the barest fraction of a pause. Malory sensed the urgency, turned to Blair and said, with completely professional detachment, "Oh—my doing, Mr. Citizens' Counselor. The dakarine wore off, as I prognosed, you'll remember, and the condemned man was frightened into hysterics. With Mr. Cardozo's permission, I gave him a shot. He's unconscious, doesn't know what's about to happen. . . . That doesn't matter, of course."

"But it does!" Blair shrilled. "The condemned man must—"

A loud, disjointed cry from the witnesses cut him off. He gaped a little, looked uncertainly about him, was checked when Brandt Cardozo raised his hand. The crowd quieted.

Hrdlicka very ostentatiously stepped back into line.

There was quiet.

"Grover," said Brandt Cardozo.

"Yes, sir?"

"If Counselor Blair does not take his proper place among the witnesses—immediately—you will put him there."

Blair, very pale now, glanced at Tasker, then shot a look at Brandt Cardozo. From Cardozo his gaze flickered to the stark post. His pallor became a little greenish. Then he hurried over to the group of spectators. Two jurors gave him room.

"Take your place with the firing squad, Grover," Cardozo ordered. "All right, Vanni—McCann—tie him up there."

They walked Tasker over to the post and strapped him to it.

He leaned stiffly forward, straps restraining him at his knees, waist and shoulders.

Cardozo stepped in front of him and lifted the death warrant. It had been scribed on a sheet of the *Tonia's* notepaper by the one battered salvaged portable.

He read it slowly, then, moving deliberately, stepped back and a few paces to one side.

"The sentence of death will now be carried out," he said loudly. "Ready!"

The squad lifted their rifles.

"Aim."

"Fire."

There was a hiss of blue flame.

Tasker's dirty shirt smoked suddenly, his body jerked and he slumped even more.

Cardozo beckoned to Malory and the two of them strode over to the post. The doctor put fingers to Tasker's wrist. After an endless moment he took them away. His voice wasn't quite steady as he said, "I pronounce this man dead."

There was a thud behind them. Malory and Cardozo jerked their heads around and saw Hugo Blair lying on the ground, face downward. Malory moved uncertainly.

"Leave him be," a juror called out. "He's just passed out."

Cardozo stared a moment at the fidgeting witnesses, then said, "The execution of David Tasker has been carried out as prescribed by the law of the New World. You will please leave the place of execution immediately, in a quiet and orderly manner."

They all started toward the yardgate, walking fast. One or two looked down at Blair as they passed him. One man suddenly put his hand to his mouth, gazed frantically about him, then ran for the gate.

No one laughed at him.

Brandt Cardozo saw that none of the silent crowd stepped any nearer to the unconscious Blair than they had to.

One gauge of both a writer's and a magazine editor's talents is the degree of interest shown in his work by anthologists, and Anthony Boucher has received high marks in both capacities. For this reason we account ourselves singularly lucky to find available the following pleasingly ingenious adventure of our old friend, Fergus O'Brien.

Gandolphus

by Anthony Boucher

"If there was a detective's union," said my friend Fergus O'Brien, "I'd be out on my ear."

It was a good hook. I filled the steins again with Tuborg dark and got ready to listen.

"Remember that Compleat Werewolf business right here in Berkeley?" Fergus went on. "Or the time machine alibi in L.A.? You take now Dr. Fell or H.M. or Merlini; practically every case they get looks like it's supernatural or paranormal and they just plain know it isn't and start in solving it by 'How was this normally gimmicked?' Rules of the profession. Gentleman's agreement. Only to me things happen, and they don't fit."

"And what was it this time?" I asked. "A poltergeist? Or an authentic Martian invasion?"

Fergus shook his head. "It was . . . Gandolphus. And what Gandolphus was . . . Look: I'll tell you how I got dealt in. Then you can read the rest for yourself. I wangled a photostat of the damndest document . . .

"It was when I was back in New York last year. Proving a Long Lost Heir was a phony—nice routine profitable job. So it's all polished off and I stick around Manhattan a couple of days just for kicks and I'm having dinner with friends when I meet this character Harrington. I won't describe him; he characterizes himself better than I could. So he learns I'm a private investigator; and just like people learn you're a writer and give with their life histories, and he drops his problem in my lap.

"It looks more like a police job to me, and I tell him so; and

since I know Bill Zobel in his precinct I say I'll introduce him. He's all hot to get started, once he's got the idea; so we take a cab down and Bill thinks it's worth looking into and we all go over to Harrington's apartment in Sheridan Square.

"Now you've got to understand about Bill Zobel. He is—or was at this time I'm talking about—a damned good straight cop. Absolutely efficient, more intelligent than average . . . and human. Tough enough when he had to be, but no rough stuff for its own sake.

"Bill and I settled down in the living room to watch for whoever or whatever Gandolphus might be, and Harrington went into his study to type a full formal statement of the complaint he'd sketched to us. It was about two A.M. by now; and we were too tired for chess or cribbage even if we hadn't been kind of scared by the too damned beautiful boards and men Harrington offered us. So Bill Zobel switched on WQXR and we sat listening to music and Harrington's typing.

"The typing stopped at three. Nobody had come or gone, not even Gandolphus, through the one door of the study. At three fifteen we went in. Harrington was dead, and to me it looked natural."

Fergus stopped.

"To date," I said flatly, "this is no payment for good beer."

He reached for his briefcase. "At that point," he said, "I thought it was just about the most pointless evening I'd ever spent. Then, while we waited for the men from the Medical Examiner's office, Bill and I read what Harrington had been typing."

He handed me a sheaf of photostats. They were labeled *Statement found in and beside typewriter of Charles Harrington, deceased.*

My name is Charles Harrington. I am fifty-three years of age, and a native American citizen. My residence is 13 Sheridan Square.

That is, I believe, the correct way to begin a statement? But the way from that point on leads through thornier brambles or,

to shift the metaphor, through a maze in which the desideratum is to find, not the locus of egress, but the locus of entrance.

My name may not be unfamiliar to such as are interested in hagiography and iconography. My collection of tenth-century objects of virtu relating to Christian devotional practices has made my apartment, I dare say, an irreligious Mecca to many (inevitably one recalls the Roman Catholic church which one observed in San Francisco, which so unbigotedly advertises itself as "a Mecca of devoton for the faithful since 1906"); and hardly any one concerned with the variant vagaries of the mystic mind can be totally ignorant of the series of monographs which will some day form the definitive "life" of St. Gandolphus the Lesser. (I place the term "*life*" within quotation marks because the purpose of the book is to demonstrate the fact that the canonized gentleman never existed.)

The habits of a scholar should perhaps make easier the compilation of such a statement as this; but familiar though I may be with the miraculous in the tenth century, the . . . shall we say, unusual in the twentieth is more disturbing.

Let us put it that the matter began a month ago, on Saturday, October the thirtieth. I was taking my conventional evening stroll, which on this particular evening led me toward Washington Square. The weather was warm, you will recall; and you are doubtless familiar with Washington Square of a warm evening?

The mating proclivities of the human animal can flourish as well in autumn as in spring, if the thermometer be but auspicious; and Washington Square of such an evening is an unsettling spectacle to a man of voluntary celibacy. I had regretted my choice of locale and started to turn homeward when the thing flashed in my face.

It seemed, in fact, aimed directly at my eyes; and I knew a moment of terror, since sight has ever been to me by far the most rewarding of the senses. And although I dodged its direct impact, by swifter muscular response than I should have thought myself capable of (you will condone the informality of that con-

struction), I felt a renewal of terror in the instant of the sudden blinding flash of its explosion.

The couples near me were too engrossed in other pursuits to pay any heed to me as I stood there trembling for what must have been a full minute. Only at the end of that time was I able to open my eyes, reassure myself that my sight was unimpaired, and observe upon the grass the shattered remains of what had so disproportionately terrified me. It was obvious from the fragments that the object had been a child's toy, modeled not upon the engines of my own childhood or the aeroplanes of my nephews', but upon an interplanetary spaceship such as is employed by the hero of cartoon adventures named, I believe, Buck Ruxton.

That the child should make no attempt to reclaim his toy after so nearly serious an accident is understandable. It is possibly also understandable that I, after so severe a nervous shock, was forced in the course of the short journey home to stop in three successive drinking establishments and in each to consume a pony of brandy.

I relate all this in order to make clear why I, a normally abstemious if definitely not abstentious man, retired that night with sufficient alcohol within me (I had added a fourth brandy upon my return to the apartment) to ensure an unusually, even abnormally sound sleep. It does not explain why I awoke next morning in most exquisite agony; but no hypothesis yet advanced has explained why, upon occasions, the mildest overindulgence may produce more severe reactions than many a protracted debauch.

Only after the ingestion of such palliatives as aspirin, raw egg, tomato juice and coffee was I sufficiently conscious to become aware of what had happened in my apartment during my sleep.

To put it briefly and colloquially: Someone had drunk himself silly. Silly, indeed, he had been to start with; for indiscriminately he had emptied my cooking sherry and my Sandeman '07, my finest cognac and the blended rye which my younger nephew fancied. And all direct from the bottles: the dead soldiers stood all a-row, but no glasses had been soiled.

As I assured you at the precinct station, no key save my own

opens my door. Because of the value of my objects of vertu, even the superintendent and the cleaning woman are admitted only by appointment. The windows could be considered as entrances only by the most experienced "human fly."

I need not say, therefore, that I was sorely perplexed by the puzzle thus presented to me, nor that I wondered why a burglar, by whatever means he had procured admittance, should confine his attentions to my potable treasures when the apartment contains so many portable articles of value.

I took no action. My civic conscience is not readily aroused, and a police inquiry would disorder my life far more thoroughly than had the burglar. And the next occurrence, involving though it did those very articles of value neglected in the first instance, contained no element of interest to the police.

After a night of unusually heavy sleep occasioned by late work on Hagerstein's ridiculously inept thesis on St. Gandolphus, I awoke to find a light still burning faintly in this study. I entered, to discover that the gleam was that of a vigil light (late ninth century) burning before my treasured tenth-century image of Our Lady, Font of Piety. Upon the prie-dieu (thirteenth century, but betraying unquestionable tenth-century influence), which normally stood across the room but now had been adjusted directly before the image, lay a tenth-century illuminated breviary, open at the Office of the Blessed Virgin. Most startling fact of all, there was still visible upon the worn velvet of the prie-dieu the fresh and unmistakable imprint of human knees.

You will surely recall the legend (it is no more, as I have incontestably established) of the novice who fell asleep in the midst of copying a manuscript and awakened to find his task completed and the text illuminated far beyond his powers, with the minute signature woven into one of the initial letters: *Gandolphus*. There persists a handful of similar accounts of the unobserved and somewhat elfin post mortem activities of St. Gandolphus the Lesser; you will readily understand why the unseen fellow-tenant of my apartment was thenceforth, to me, Gandolphus.

But the contradictory nature of his activities puzzled me; one

night of drunken orgy, one night of kneeling prayer. Nor was the puzzle closer to solution upon that morning on which I discovered in this typewriter an exquisite sonnet—so remarkable in its perfection that it has since been accepted for publication, under a pseudonym, by one of our better journals—signed (as though the invader could read my mind) with the name *Gandolphus*.

I shall pass rapidly over the embarrassing morning when I awakened with a curious pain in my back, to discover in the guest-room a fair-haired young woman who greeted me with the indecipherable remark "Honey! . . . Hey! For a minute I thought you was him!" who proved to be the vendor of cigarettes at a nearby place of entertainment, and who departed abruptly and in a state of bewilderment conceivably exceeding my own.

Nor shall I linger over the disappearance of two thousand dollars in ten-dollar bills, present in the apartment because a certain type of art dealer, I must confess, prefers transactions of this sort (fuller details, I assure you, would have no bearing upon this investigation), and the ecstasy of the more impoverished Italians in Bleeker Street over the vaguely described stranger who had pounded on shoddy doors in dead of night to deliver handfuls of bills.

I shall simply stress here the cumulative inconsistency of these proceedings: inebriety, religiosity, poetry, eroticism, philanthropy . . . an insane medley of the loftiest and basest experiences of which the human animal is capable.

It is this inconsistency which leads me unhesitatingly to reject the most apparently obvious "solution" of my mystery: that the fellow occupant of my apartment is no other than myself; that Box and Cox, Harrington and Gandolphus, are, in short, Jekyll and Hyde.

For whereas of his actions to date the inebriety and the concupiscence might be considered evidence of Hydean depravity, the sonnet and the almsgiving represent an exalted sublimation of which, I confess, the poor Jekyll in question is flatly incapable; and the religiosity, to my mind, fits into neither character. This is not I, nor yet another I. This is being unknown to me, sharing

the apartment to which only I have access, and indulging in actions which seem to me to have only this in common: that all represent singularly heightened forms of human experience.

This brings me to what I fear may well be the most overwhelming experience which Gandolphus has yet known, and the reason which has driven me, at whatever cost to the placidity of my own ordered existence, finally to lay this problem before a private detective and, upon his insistence, to communicate it to the police.

When I conveyed to you the nature of the incidents already here related, I found it hard to explain even to myself what "mental block" (if I may be permitted so jargonic a term) prevented me from communicating to you this evidence of the ultimate extremity of the quest of Gandolphus.

I refer, of course, to the kitchen knife which I discovered this morning still coated with blood which a private laboratory this afternoon assured me is human.

* * *

It is considerate of me, I think, to put those three asterisks there to denote the transition.

The knife, of course, is what alters the whole situation. That one bloody fact is sufficient to disrupt the tranquil *modus vivendi* which I believed that I had attained.

If you professional detectives, public and private, are as perceptive as, in rummaging around in this mind, I find some reason to believe you are, you will by now have realized many things. You will have understood, for instance, precisely what happened that Saturday night in Washington Square, and that the bright and exploding object was not a toy spaceship.

You will even understand, perhaps, which word should have been underlined in that last sentence.

But I am not at all sorry that things should end as they now must. I have felt hampered here. It is not the ideal habitation in which to pursue my research. I was forced to realize this, in a somewhat comical but nonetheless vexatious manner, in the

fourth of the episodes related above, and again to some extent in the sixth, that of the knife. There is also the matter of music, which I gather from reading to be one of the major human experiences; but these ears that I employ are tone-deaf.

In short, I need a better vehicle. And just outside of this room—listening, as a matter of fact, to music at this moment—is (I find the phrase lying somewhere in a corner of this mind) metal more attractive.

There is no reason why I may not be frank. You will surely have gathered that it is imperative that I explore and realize every sensation of the inhabitants of this planet. Only through this experience can I convey to the ships that follow a proper scout's report on the symbiotic potential here. Every sensation which the host may undergo and force its symbiotic companion to share—I *must know what it is like*.

So I am turning off this machine, which has served its introductory purpose. But before I abandon it, I shall (curious how with practice it becomes possible to use them awake as well as asleep) use its fingers to type.

Respectfully yours,
(I believe that is
the proper subscription?),
GANDOLPHUS

I took my time about refilling the steins. The photostats deserved some thought. I was not particularly inclined to argue with Fergus' description of them as the damndest document I'd ever read in my life.

"I suppose," I ventured finally, "the knife did check—dimensions of blade, blood type and so on—with some known killing on the night in question?"

"It did," said Fergus. "An Italian peddler."

"And the knife had only Harrington's prints on it?"

"Of course."

"The pattern's clear enough. Obviously neurotic self-centered celibate entering the perilous fifties. Very self-revealing—pretty

standard schizoid set-up, though I'll admit that wild episode of philanthropy is a new one on me. Harrington's death was natural, I suppose?"

Fergus grunted, "Syncope was the word the M.E. used. In English words, something turned off the machine."

"It's a good case," I admitted. "One of the odder build-ups to murder. But why on earth—"

"Why should it get me kicked out of the union? Because Bill Zobel dozed off."

I said "So?"

"It was late and it kept getting later at the station while they piled up all these facts about knives and syncope. And finally Bill dozed off. He woke up when a patrolman came in yelling he'd picked up a hot suspect in a recent series of muggings. Nothing to do with the Harrington business; but the muggings were Bill's baby and he went off to question the suspect.

"The guy was guilty all right. Plenty of evidence turned up later. But he never came to trial. He died of the beating he got that night . . . from Bill Zobel, the tough straight cop who never stood for rough stuff.

"It got hushed up; there was nobody to make a beef. But I was there; I saw the guy before the ambulance came. It was an artistic job; that night Gandolphus learned everything he needed to know about sadism—he hadn't tried that one yet; couldn't, maybe, with Harrington's body.

"Maybe you didn't hear out in the West about the rest of Zobel's career. The beating was bad enough. Then they began to watch him when they saw he was spending damned near his whole month's salary on concert and opera tickets. Precinct captains aren't exactly used to that in their men.

"The next month's salary, and a pretty penny to boot, went to Chambord and Twenty-One and Giovanni's and Lüchow's. He was dining like Nero Wolfe as a guest of Lucullus, with Escoffier in the kitchen. He was also hanging around off-duty in some joints in the Village—the kind of joint a policeman never goes into ex-

cept for a raid, when you don't need a matron to search the sopranos.

"The talk that started died down a little when Zobel suddenly got engaged to his captain's daughter—hell of a sweet kid; you could still smell the starch-and-incense of the convent, but her eyes had a gleam . . . Later on, when the gleam was doused, she told me they'd never had a clinch you couldn't show on a TV screen; our friend was learning that there was more to love than backaches. Her Bill, she said, was so groundlessly jealous he made Othello look like the agreeable husband in a Restoration comedy.

"The pay-off came when Zobel picked up a dope-peddler and went on a jag with the bastard's bindles.

"His record up to then was so clean they let him down easy and fixed a psychiatric discharge. Next month he got picked up once as a peeping Tom and once for inciting to riot in Union Square. Gandolphus wasn't missing a sensation."

"But you see," I interrupted, "we did hear about Zobel in the West." It was a fine rich feeling to have the topper for the first time in my years of knowing Fergus O'Brien. "We even met him. He was a guest speaker at a meeting of Mystery Writers of America. He told us, and damned frankly too, about the nervous breakdown he'd had last year and the psychiatric discharge and the course of treatments that led the police psychiatrist to recertify him finally. Lieutenant Zobel's happily married, professionally successful . . ."

Fergus looked glum and disgruntled. "So you knew the topper," he said. "Yes, Bill's a normal man again. This time the machine wasn't turned off. Gandolphus just left. He'd found out what he needed. And like a good scout, he's gone back with his report on our symbiotic potential.

"Care to make a small bet as to what that report is?"

The Last Shall Be First

by Robert P. Mills

The last room in the world was in the first spaceship, and the first spaceship was also the last spaceship, and it had never left the ground.

The last man in the world, on the other hand, had no reason to believe that he was in any sense the first man, for there was no other animal life on Earth, and he was not, he thought resignedly, self-reproducing. His resignation was largely perfunctory, because he was really quite happy.

The world was rich and fertile, the air pure and winy, and the man by nature ascetic, philosophical—and fearful. And now there was nothing to fear, for evil on Earth had gone with the last breath of the last rival for the position of king of the Universe.

Much as the man admired the simple way of life, however, he was not handy, and his attempts at creating satisfactory shelter out of hand-hewn logs and river mud had been miserable failures. He found his present arrangement a most happy compromise. . . . He had simply erected his cabin inside the main cabin of the spaceship, which was made of a metal that promised to endure forever.

Unlike, fortunately, all other materials that man had created by perverting the natural forms of the materials around him.

By unrelenting concentration, the man had managed totally to forget the artificial nature of the shell protecting him from the occasionally argumentative elements. He even ignored the steady march of the hands on the cesium clock.

He reveled in the conscienceless life everywhere around him—life that offered no threat, life that made no judgments, life that supported him, life that carried him on its lifting shoulder across an infinite reach toward a shore that could be only Elysium.

He had thought of the thick forests as cathedrals; now he no longer channeled his thinking with terminology, and his feeling was less respect and awe than it was shared, towering strength. As he gazed out over an endless plain choked with wheat, he smiled paternally. When the apple trees were heavy with blossoms, he breathed on them so that they would be healthy.

While somewhere in a black deep the last coelacanth sank into the bottom silt and died.

And the last man sat in his room as a storm raged up from the south, and young trees slashed the sky with their tender, hopeful branches, small floods washed down healed gullies, and lightning sprang from the fat-bellied clouds. And the man was content, because the only hell was in the past, which was no longer.

Then, almost imperceptibly, the hands on the cesium clock that had fragmented and spewed out the hours and minutes and seconds of the man's march toward safe immortality, slowed, and stopped . . . and turned backwards. The hands turned back from midnight, announced the retreating twilight. And the strong winds turned, and the torrents from the antiseptic sky flowed rushing upwards, and the thunder roaring from beyond the hill was followed by split daggers of lightning gutting the retreating clouds.

The man realized at once, never having been certain, really *certain*, once in his long lone life, knowing that it had been hopeless, that every man must have his hell—even if the Universe must turn grumbling in its unimaginably cumbersome orbit to bite him, to chew him, to spit him back into the pit; knowing that *every* man must have his chance at hell, and if there ever existed a hell without men, then men must be found to fill it, even if time must be turned.

The man knew, and when the knock came at the door, he

sighed. And when the knock came again, he gathered himself, and raised his voice effortfully.

"Not today . . . not today . . ." he said. "Come back yesterday."

A delightful little fantasy . . . but only, we hasten to add, if you are interested in the fine art of seduction.

A Trick or Two

by John Novotny

At nine that evening Laura walked beautifully into the apartment.

"Hello, Jesse," she said softly. "For some reason I thought you had given up."

"You underestimate me, Laura," he said, removing her coat. "And yourself. You never looked lovelier."

"Thank you, Jesse," she smiled, accepting a glass of champagne. "I've never been in better shape. I'm ready to go ten rounds, if necessary."

"That was uncalled-for, darling," he said, hurt. "You make me sound crude. Perhaps in other days . . . but now I'm of a different mind."

"Fine," Laura applauded, laughing gayly. "Don't tell me what role you're playing tonight. It will be more fun if I have to guess."

Jesse had a wonderful dinner waiting and they ate by candlelight. Later they sipped benedictine by the picture window overlooking the river.

"You make it seem so worthwhile, Jesse," Laura murmured. "There are moments when I almost feel like giving the devil his due."

"That's what I'm planning on," Jesse said casually.

"Oh?" Laura answered questioningly. "You expect me to succumb, to offer myself to you, out of the goodness of my heart?"

"Or the badness," Jesse added.

"I wish you luck."

"Thank you," Jesse said. "Then you agree that should you stand before me unclothed, I might assume, rightfully, that I have won the game?"

"Unclothed—by force?"

"No, my dear. No force," he smiled.

"I agree that under those circumstances you'd have a pretty good assumption," Laura said. "When do you expect me to go into this disrobing act?"

"Most anytime," Jesse said. "To hasten your decision, let me show you a few little presents I have for you."

Jesse kept himself from hurrying as he led her to the two closet doors. He opened one and pointed to the furs hanging inside.

"My choice?" Laura asked.

"All of them," Jesse said. "Look them over."

She stepped inside the closet and Jesse smiled. His mind raced over the events of the past week.

Jesse Haimess sipped his scotch pensively, then placed the glass decisively on the table and leaned toward his friend.

"Mind you, Tom," he said, "it isn't that I haven't tried. Lord knows, I've played the gentleman, the brother, and the man-of-the-world. I've been patient, impatient, persuasive."

"Generous?" Tom inquired.

"Abundantly," Jesse insisted. "I even bought her a poodle."

"And through it all," Tom Casey smiled, "Miss Laura Carson remains unconquered, unsullied, unbowed."

"Disgustingly so," Jesse admitted.

"Let's have another drink," Tom suggested, signaling the waiter. "Or do you have a conference this afternoon?"

"Nothing," Jesse said. "A few letters to get out and some desks must be moved. We're changing the accounting room to the Forty-eighth Street side."

"Dry work," Tom Casey said. "Another scotch is definitely in order."

They sat back, waiting for the drinks, and pondered the enigma of Miss Laura Carson. Tom watched Jesse light a cigarette. As Jesse brought his hand down to drop the match in the ash tray, Tom reached forward and snapped his fingers.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said. The ash tray vanished. Jesse's hand

froze and he stared at the spot where the glass container had rested. Finally he smiled foolishly.

"Well done, Tom," he said. "How did you do it?"

"Magic," Tom said, self-consciously. "I don't usually fool around in public, but I just had the urge."

"I didn't know that was your hobby."

"It's not," Tom laughed. "That's my trick. Nothing else."

"Bring it back," Jesse said.

"I can't," Tom confessed. "I can make small items disappear. Where they go, I have no idea."

Jesse stopped smiling and began to frown. He restrained himself as the waiter approached and served the drinks. He watched the man walk away; then he turned hurriedly back to Tom Casey.

"Are you trying to tell me that this business is on the level?" he demanded, gesturing aimlessly at the center of the table. Tom nodded foolishly.

"I don't believe it," Jesse said. "After all . . . come now, Tom."

"Put your swizzle stick out there," Tom said.

Jesse slowly pushed the plastic stirring rod to the spot indicated. Tom snapped his fingers at the stick.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said. The object disappeared.

"Good Lord," Jesse breathed. "And to think I doubted Dunninger."

The two men sat silently until Jesse called the waiter.

"Two more scotches," he ordered, "and an ash tray."

The waiter brought the drinks and the ash tray, surveyed the table and its occupants suspiciously, and departed.

"Can you teach me?" Jesse asked.

"I don't think so," Tom explained. "An old proofreader out in Denver told me about it. Everybody has one trick he can do. The proofreader could change water into whisky. That was his trick and a very handy one."

"Do you mean I have some bit of magic I can do?" Jesse asked excitedly.

"Everyone has," Tom said. "Mine you just saw."

"How does a person find out his trick—if that's what you call it?"

Tom shrugged.

"Most people never do, I guess," he said. "I just stumbled on mine."

"Maybe mine is the same as yours," Jesse suggested.

"Try it," Tom said, isolating the ash tray. Jesse replaced it with a swizzle stick.

"The waiter would raise hell about another ash tray," he explained. He took a deep breath, snapped his fingers, and intoned the necessary phrase. The stirrer remained.

"Did I do something wrong?" Jesse asked hopefully. Tom shook his head.

"Perfect technique," he said. "Negative result."

"I guess I have a different talent," Jesse murmured. "Damn it! How am I going to find out what it is?"

"It's not that important," Tom Casey said. "Unless it's the water and whisky deal, of course."

The waiter was summoned again and soon Jesse was glaring balefully at a glass of water.

"No luck," Tom said. "I wouldn't worry about it. As I said, I hardly ever use mine. It's embarrassing when people ask questions. I can't explain the trick, so I automatically am classified as a stinker or a drunken bum. I'd just forget about it if I were you."

Jesse shook his head. The two men finished their drinks and left the restaurant. As they parted at Madison and 49th, Jesse smiled at his companion.

"First time in weeks I've been able to think about something other than Laura Carson," he said. "See you next week."

"These letters, Mr. Haimes—"

Jesse smiled at the slim brunette.

"Yes, Carol?"

"They're ready for your signature. And Mr. Wigmann would like to have two more cabinets in Accounts Payable."

"Fine," Jesse said, accepting the papers. "Tell Wiggy he'll have his cabinets in a few days."

He watched his secretary walk to her desk in the far corner of

the large, tastefully decorated office they shared. After the girl settled at the desk and was busy calling Wigmann's secretary, Jesse drew his hand out from under his own desk. He looked down expectantly at the hat he held.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he muttered. No rabbit materialized.

"Thank God," he whispered. "I wasn't particularly anxious to have that ability."

Carol finished her call and came across the office.

"Yes, Carol?"

"Mr. Wigmann requests that if the cabinets are among the surplus items in the next room, could he look at them, in order to plan where they will be placed."

"Tell him to come over in five minutes. We may have to move a few things."

The girl returned to the phone and then joined Jesse as he unlocked the door to the small office next to his. It had been pressed into use as a storage area during the reorganization period and was filled with varied pieces of office equipment. Jesse pointed.

"As I suspected," he said. "Damn! All the way in the back. I'll push these desks aside if you'll move the lamps and chairs."

After a few moments of cooperative endeavor Carol and Jesse Haimes stood before the two cabinets. Each was two and a half feet wide by seven feet tall. The cabinets had no shelves and were intended to hold clothing. Jesse opened one of the metal doors and looked inside.

"Wiggy will have to arrange for shelves," he said, closing the door. "He can call Griswold and—"

Jesse stopped and looked at the cabinet. Dimly he recalled a vaudeville act he had once enjoyed.

"Carol," he said, hesitantly. "Would you—well, this may seem odd—"

"Yes, Mr. Haimes?"

Jesse decided that wording was less important than results.

"Would you mind stepping into this cabinet for one moment?"

Carol smiled.

"Into the—cabinet?"

"Yes. Into the cabinet."

"I don't understand."

"In all probability," Jesse said, "there will be nothing to understand. If there is I will explain later."

"I hope so," Carol said, still smiling. She lifted the hem of her skirt slightly and stepped up into the locker-like affair.

"Thank you," Jesse said. He closed the door and stepped back. With squared shoulders he faced the cabinet.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said, softly enough so that Carol couldn't hear. He opened the cabinet and smiled in assuringly. Jesse swallowed hard as he looked at the empty space. Hurriedly he leaped to the remaining cabinet and opened the door.

"Don't be alarmed, Car— Oh, Lord!"

Carol stood framed in the cabinet. She was nude and she was angry. Jesse looked away and then, deciding the hell with it, he looked back.

"What have you done with your clothes?" he asked.

"What have *I* done?" Carol said, ominously. She pushed one bare foot forward, then pointed to her neck. "From pumps to my black choker ribbon. *Whsst*. You've never been better."

She stepped carelessly from the cabinet and sank into one of the surplus swivel chairs.

"You said you'd explain," she said. "This had better be good. Your apartment is one thing, the office is entirely different. I've always insisted—"

She stopped and looked at the cabinet she had just vacated.

"That's not the one I— Oh brother, you better start talking. I think I'll scream."

She opened her mouth and Jesse leaped forward to cover it with his hand.

"I can explain!" he said quickly. Carol relaxed and Jesse took his hand away.

"OK," she said. "Explain."

Jesse looked at the two cabinets and then back at Carol.

"I can't," he said unhappily. Carol opened her mouth wide.

"Wait!" Jesse pleaded. "I mean I don't know how it happened."

Passing you from one cabinet to another just happens to be my trick."

"Oh," Carol said, raising her eyebrows. "Your trick, eh? Do you mind if your naked little secretary says you certainly have a fine collection. And may I ask what you intend to do right now?"

She swiveled in the chair and made a complete circle.

"Not very much room in here," she said tersely.

"Carol, I—"

"Apartments are apartments. Offices are offices. And I don't care for that trick. If you—"

"*Mr. Haimes. Mr. Haimes.*"

They both leaped up as Mr. Wigmann's voice floated in from Jesse's office.

"Wait there!" Jesse shouted.

"Oh, I can come in and—"

"No," Jesse shouted frantically. "Just wait a moment. Until I get things—straightened out."

"Very well," Wiggy answered. They could hear his steps as he wandered about the office.

"Get in the cabinet," Jesse whispered to Carol.

"Like hell," Carol whispered. "Never again."

"Carol," Jesse pleaded. He leaned down and kissed her full on the lips. "Ten dollars a week raise. The Winter Garden and the Stork Club one evening next week. A new gown."

Carol melted.

"Mr. Haimes. That isn't necessary."

"It certainly is," he said. "I've done you an injustice. Offices are offices. I promise to remember."

She threw both bare arms around his neck and kissed him. Drawing away, she smiled, "Into the cabinet." As she stepped in, Jesse permitted himself one light pat on Carol's pert rump and closed the door.

"Wiggy," he called. "Now you can come in. I've finally located them."

Mr. Wigmann walked into the smaller room and approached the cabinets.

"Excellent, perfect," he said. "Good of you, Haimes, to go to the trouble. Heavens, you're perspiring something fierce. I assure you I could have waited."

"Not at all," Jesse assured him, leading him away.

"But the insides—"

"Nothing. Bare." Jesse coughed on the last word. "You'll have to arrange for shelves. See Griswold."

He ushered Wiggy to the door, shook hands, and propelled the little man into the hall. Jesse then went to the phone and dialed.

"Miss Devins? Jesse Haimes," he announced. "No, don't call B.J. I want to speak to you. I have a favor to ask. My club is putting on a show and we're missing one outfit—a girl's. I'd have asked Carol but she is out on business at the moment.—You will? Fine.—Size?—Oh, about Carol's size. One each of the following: dress . . ."

A little later he returned to the small office and released Carol.

"Don't worry about your clothes," he said. "I've sent down for a complete new outfit."

"Who?"

"B.J.'s secretary. Miss Devins," he told her.

"Good," Carol smiled. "She has excellent taste and is very conscientious. She'll take at least an hour."

Hand in hand they returned to Jesse's office.

Three days later he completed the construction work in his apartment. The two cabinets were built in flush with the wall and looked like nothing else than closet doors. Jesse put his tools away and prepared the final test. He took the small kewpie doll and placed it on the floor of closet number one. Carefully he patted the lace dress in place and rearranged the tiny cap. Finally he stood up, closed the door, and backed off.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said, waving a few fingers negligently. He strode to cabinet number two, opened the door, and smiled as he picked up the shiny little plastic body.

"Excellent," he murmured. "Now to call Miss Laura Carson."

Jesse silently closed the cabinet door behind Laura as she hummed through the furs. Quickly he stepped back and raised his arm.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he sang.

The room was quiet except for the soft music Jesse had playing in the background. He walked to cabinet two and opened the door. Laura stood there and Jesse drew a deep breath even though he was prepared. She smiled, unflustered and completely calm, as she stepped from the cabinet. Her body was flawless, perfect, warm and soft. Graceful movements shadowed ivory-tan skin as she walked in the soft lights. Her dark hair was long and lay tantalizingly on exquisite shoulders. Jesse was forced to lock his hands behind his back. Laura walked halfway across the room, then turned and looked at the two doors.

"You're naked," Jesse said hoarsely. Laura looked down at herself.

"Never more so," she laughed. As her body moved in laughter Jesse was forced to remove his tie. Laura walked to the big window where moonlight crept across her body. Jesse removed his shirt.

"You seem very much at ease," he remarked. "No surprise?" Laura shook her head as he continued undressing.

"It's quite obvious that you have discovered your trick," she said.

For a moment Jesse stopped, balancing on one leg.

"Even so," he said, determined not to lose the advantage, "the circumstances have worked out."

"That's true," Laura said, "but please do me a favor."

"Yes?"

"Will you hold that fire iron out at arm's length?"

Jesse walked wonderingly to the fireplace, picked up the poker, and held it out. Laura raised a long slender forefinger and pointed at the brass tool; and in Jesse's hand the poker became pliable, soft, and wilted like wax before a flame. He stared at it in horror.

"Jesse," Laura said. "I discovered my trick long ago."

A profoundly real treatment of a familiar but still potent theme—survival after atomic devastation.

Lot's Daughter

by Ward Moore

Mr. Jimmon put a finger tenderly against an upper molar. It did not ache yet, but he knew the signs, felt the pain waves still of too high a frequency for translation into sensation. Tomorrow he would be in agony, and for days afterward. Then the pain would go; six months or a year later the gray, porous shell would work loose and drop out. It had happened several times in the six years—Mr. Jimmon, was pretty sure it was six years, not seven—since . . . Mr. Jimmon didn't care to finish the sentence, even mentally, for he was a man who shrank from the too-dramatic, the over-romantic. And if you did not stop short you would have to conclude: since the End of Civilization, or since we Fled the Holocaust, or since Man Decided on Suicide. All capitalized. Theatrical, even if accurate.

Should've had them all extracted, he thought as he had thought so often. And appendix. Apprehension projected a detailed picture of unendurable pain while Erika stood by helpless to ease him. As he had stood by when . . .

But that was natural, in the course of nature, he objected. Bring forth your young in labor; rationalization from observation, transferred to a supernatural command. No prophet ever got a revelation reading: Thou shalt die miserably of an inflamed bowel.

"If you expect to eat, you better get up now."

Erika's voice was matter-of-fact, emotionless. She was not nagging him at the moment; she did not condemn his idleness, she stated the incontrovertible. He who doesn't work won't eat. In a dead world the cliché was immortally triumphant.

"You hear me, Dad?"

"Heard you," said Mr. Jimmon.

He tried to shut his ears against the sounds of her moving about, and the boy's "I want something to eat," as he shut his eyes to the dawn light. He was not sleepy, not tired even; he just didn't want to leave his bed. Hadn't wanted to for the last few days, in fact; his habitual energy and determination seemed to have slipped away. Perhaps it had been going for a long time.

Certainly the pile of dry grass on which he was lying was no snugly comfortable couch. There were stiff, thick weeds mixed through it, and the grass itself was matted in spots as though it had not been properly dried out. She had been careless in curing it again.

"Heard you," he repeated.

Long ago he'd decided they dare not keep food anywhere near the shelter lest it attract predators. Each day's provision must be sought afresh except on the rare occasions when he succeeded in shooting a large animal. They gambled then, gorging; using the meat up faster than they need have, listening for the soft padding or inquisitive snuffle of carnivores.

"Dad!"

Nagging now. "I'm getting another bad tooth," he stated, staring upward. There was no question; he could see the light coming through the roof in several places. The next rain would sluice in as though there were nothing to stop it. For the hundredth—or five hundredth—time he decided he ought to do something drastic about putting a real roof on the shelter. Have done with the makeshift of branches and thatch and soil. Get boards. Real boards, from the nearest house. Five miles. Ten trips, twenty trips . . . 100 miles. He was easily capable of walking 100 miles, 50 of them burdened with lumber. But for what? A hundred miles for a tight roof; was it worth it now that all the stuff that could be ruined by rain had already been watersoaked?

"Well. This time I certainly hope you'll let me knock it out with a nail before you waste weeks moaning over it."

Mr. Jimmon shook his head silently. He was not afraid of the pain. Or even revolted by the savagery of putting a large nail against the aching tooth and giving it a sharp blow with the ham-

mer. The shudder induced was at pictures of choking to death on the dislodged tooth or the awful realization of a broken jaw.

"It's the diet," he muttered. "No bones or gristle. Even crusty bread."

A hundred miles. If he could jump into the station wagon, explore till he found exactly what he wanted, load up and come back. If. No use dwelling on the tragedy of that immobilization.

"If you ever got up early the way you used to, you might get a deer or a rabbit; they feed at dawn. And if you walked a few miles you could kill a cow again."

He covered his eyes with his hands. "No cattle left. Either drifted away or just haven't adapted."

"More likely somebody's got them herded."

Mr. Jimmon sighed; it was the old argument. "Don't you suppose we'd have seen some sign of this enterprising, mythical character? The one who not only herds cows but rigs up gadgets and has machinery working. And what about the dogs he must have tamed; why haven't we heard the barking or noticed them sniffing around?"

"You've been too busy hiding to notice anything."

"A smart man hides from savages until the savages kill each other off or until he has some means of subduing them."

"You have no way of knowing that what you thought was going to happen before we left Malibu has actually happened."

"I was right about the other things: the panic, the crowded highways, the extortion for gasoline, the destruction. Why should I suddenly be wrong?"

"But you don't *know*. And you don't want to find out."

The fixed notion that there could be numbers going about their business as though It had never happened could become irritating. Probably fostered by concern for the boy; he remembered no such obstinacy on her part before he was born. During those frightening months her need for others had been imperative enough to induce a desperate faith in the existence of survivors. Civilized survivors like themselves trying mightily not to relapse. A faith against all reason.

"Be logical, Erika. Visualize the probabilities. First the destruction of the cities. How many died instantly? Ten million? Twenty million? Thirty million?" He began to feel some relish for the discussion, in displaying his own smooth reasoning even though he was merely repeating what he'd said so often. "Be conservative: say twenty million."

"That's only a guess. The radio never gave out figures."

"It's a logical guess, and the radio's reticence is one of the factors in the logic. But the initial destruction was only the beginning. Radiation sickness; doesn't show up right away. And disease, spread by refugees; epidemics. Filth-borne plagues, polluted water on top of malnutrition. Another thirty million anyway. Fifty million, third of the population, from only primary effects. Then crop failures. Industrial farming couldn't survive; gasoline shortage, no manpower, breakdown of equipment. Shrinking markets; lack of transportation. In the West, end of irrigation. New malnutrition, second wave of epidemics. Deaths from starvation, from rioting between the late city-folks and the farmers. Murder. Fighting for women. Gang wars. Floods and disasters due to the disappearance of government services, and a third wave of epidemics after them. Your remnant: two or three million, widely scattered in disorganized, roving bands."

"That's only the way you see it. People don't turn into savages overnight just to fit a theory—"

"No." Mr. Jimmon could not resist the opening. "They're savages already. Disruption cracks off the surface hiding the savagery underneath."

She tossed her head. "People have an instinct for cooperation; I bet it's stronger than the savagery you're always expecting. Because savagery means less food and comfort in a short time, no matter how it pays off for a moment. People aren't as stupid as you think they are; they must have organized ways of stopping the epidemics, raised food even if they had to use hoes and horses, done all kinds of things to get started again."

He removed the cowhide that served him as a blanket, with distaste. It stank worse daily. It would soon have to be discarded,

though it was the closest he had come to tanning leather successfully. "Faith," he said. "Pure, blind faith. Baseless."

"We survived, didn't we? Then there are others."

"We aren't herding cattle," he pointed out. "And we have advantages others lack."

"Have we? Is that why we live like this?"

"Better to live like this than not at all." He rose from the mattress. A pair of shorts, already worn frail, had been inexpertly improvised by Erika from the last of his pajamas. When they were gone he would have to suffer the harshness of ill-cured leather to chafe his flesh.

"We don't have to live like this," she said flatly. "Somewhere—not too far away, even—people must be living decently."

"Faith," he repeated; "faith. Wood on the fire? Don't want to have to start a new one."

"There's wood on the fire," said Erika. "And hot water."

The goatskin pants and jacket were as crudely fashioned as the shorts—more so perhaps, since the material was harder to work. The hair had come off in mangy patches; the hide beneath was rough and stiff, not soft and supple as it should have been. Only the sandals came anywhere near being satisfactory. Mr. Jimmon didn't know what had made their deerskin thongs flexible and free from decay; the hide from which he'd cut them rotted like all the others. They held the soles, made from a tire—the one punctured on the last miles of the trip and left on the spare wheel instead of being repaired at all costs in time or money—firmly and comfortably against his feet, so that he could run, if need be, as easily as in the boots or shoes, now worn out and discarded.

Dressed, he rubbed the back of his hand against his jaw. "Shaving day again," he muttered.

"I want something to eat," whined the boy.

"Dad will take care of it," said Erika. "In good time."

"Wonder," reflected Mr. Jimmon. "Would it really be too late to make some sort of calendar? Guess at the date? May or June. And keep it up from now on?"

Erika paused in her activity. (What *does* she find to keep busy with, he wondered. Women's work is never done—but what do they do without vacuum cleaners and other labor-saving devices to keep them occupied?) "What would be the good? As soon as we come across people who haven't gone native we'll find out the real date."

He got out the straight-edged razor. Forethought. Safety blades would have long since blunted into worthlessness. He stropped it tenderly, unskillfully. "What is a 'real date'? A convention agreed on by civilized communities. What civilized communities are there to agree to conventions?"

"Enough," she answered. "If we were to look for them."

"Want something to eat," repeated the boy.

Razor in hand, Mr. Jimmon walked from the shelter to the flat stones that served as fireplace a few feet beyond. Lifting the blackened kettle off the coals he kicked the fire-eaten boughs together before settling it back in place. He dipped a stiff rag into the hot water, watching it go limp, and swathed it around his jowls.

"Aaaah," he murmured luxuriously. "Ummmm."

Soap. Not hard to make; he'd explained the theory to Erika often enough. You rendered fat or tallow and mixed it with sifted wood ashes. There were always plenty of ashes and he did succeed now and then in shooting an animal. Still they had no soap. The decencies of life slipping away. Daren't let down too far.

He shaved slowly and carefully before the rear-view mirror from the station wagon. The hot water softened the gray and white hairs enough to permit cutting without scraping the skin raw, but it was still painful. "Ought to make soap," he muttered.

The boy had followed him outside and was watching intently. "Dad," he said, not asking, just idly stating. Mr. Jimmon felt the obligation to reply but found no ready words. He turned his face slightly away, in the direction of the brook delicately winding between the trees. It was normally so shallow that dipping water from it was a nuisance. A little farther upstream was a natural basin; he had intended to dam it ever since they came to the end of their flight here.

He wiped the razor thoroughly dry on the sleeve of his jacket and put it down on a rock. "You going to need this warm water any more?" he called to Erika.

She came to the opening of the shelter, her blond hair unevenly streaked with sunburn and drawn tightly back from her forehead. The line of her jaw from ear to chin was delicately firm. Caught unexpectedly, Mr. Jimmon looked full at her before dropping his eyes.

The top of a dress of Molly's was tucked into a pair of levis, also Molly's. She was thin—slender was perhaps the better word—but not over-thin, like her mother. On a good diet she might even fill out the slight hollows in her cheeks. Perhaps not; there was an intensity about Erika, emphasized in her eyes, that indicated a tendency to sparseness.

Six years, seven years; he couldn't say to her, How old are you now, Erika, twenty, twenty-one? The time had been longer for her than for him, much longer. One of the reasons she clung to the fantasy of civilized survivors. Hopeless, dreary otherwise. And what did he cling to? Daily food-getting. Hanging on.

"What am I supposed to do with it? Do the dishes we didn't bring along because you wouldn't burden yourself with things? Wash the clothes we don't have any more? Mop the dirt floor? Sterilize something?"

He had sterilized the knife with which she'd cut the cord. "All right. All right. I only asked."

He took up the kettle by the bailer and emptied it. Aluminum, even heavy cast aluminum like this, was going to wear out soon. He remembered how he'd debated between it and a cast iron one. A single mishap with cast iron, one drop on a sharp rock and . . . The aluminum, even if it developed a pinhole or two, would still be useful. Despite her unjust taunts about dishes and the dirt floor (how did one go about making concrete if there were no bags of cement to be bought?) he had foreseen intelligently.

Must be close to 7 already. If his watch hadn't stopped permanently. Moisture-proof; return to manufacturer. Hers had lasted

nearly a year longer, though it had been little more than an ornament. Its sole function now; she wore it sometimes as jewelry. Her only trinket. (Molly had never been one of those gem-loving women, give her her due.) Remind her not to leave it hanging up in plain sight like that.

Time to eat; was he really hungry? Or habit? If it were possible to eat breakfast now, instead of just the first meal of the day. Real breakfast. Chilled grapefruit with a maraschino cherry in the center. Cornflakes and cream with sugar. Sugar. Bacon and eggs; eggs fresh from a domestic hen in a commercial henhouse, not gulls' like Erika sometimes found. And . . .

Six years since the smell of coffee last stung his nostrils. Nevertheless his taste buds responded to the memory and his mouth watered. "Wonder," he said aloud.

"What?"

She was still standing in the doorway. Opening, really; it couldn't be called a doorway since it was only the place where he had not built the wall. Before the rains came he must make it into a genuine doorway, perhaps even provide a door of some sort. No real reason to reproach himself for having been too busy to do it before, rather stress what he had accomplished. No need to be ashamed of the shelter's smallness, meanness, inadequacy; how many other civilized men without training, preparation or experience—or even for that matter, taste for it (he recalled Molly's contemptuous, "You were never the rugged, outdoor type, David,")—could have done as well?

"Few," he muttered.

He became conscious of her look. "Are you going to go after food, or stand there talking to yourself? It's getting to be a habit."

"Um. Might go after rabbits."

Her derisive glance was not totally unkind. "That case I'll go down to the ocean and see what I can find."

He followed her through the unfinished wall. To one side the seats from the station wagon served as beds for her and the boy; his own grass pallet was opposite. From the ingenious conceal-

ment of a length of bark fastened to the true wall he drew out the rifle swathed in rags.

"Thought you said rabbits."

"Mmm." For a moment, holding one hand on the stock, the other on the barrel, he indulged the fantasy of coming suddenly on a deer and dropping it with a cool shot. Too late in the day, though of course it was always possible to be lucky. He smiled wryly as he replaced the rifle.

"All right." He reached under the seat and drew out another bundle.

He broke open the shotgun. The bore looked clean; he poked a rag through it anyway. The ammunition was concealed in several caches; even if two or three were discovered he wouldn't be stripped clean. Shells and cartridges were not intermixed; finding a cache of one wouldn't lead intruders to search for the other weapon. Always one jump ahead of the looters. You had to be.

"We're going now, Dad."

"All right. Maybe I'll get something." Was he merely obstinate in starting off to hunt when experience had shown the only sure way to get food was from the ocean? He selected six shells, letting his fingers fondle them briefly, putting one in the breech of the shotgun. From still another hiding place he retrieved the briefcase. It had been ancient when he discarded it many years ago, an old-fashioned zipperless impediment with a handle, straps, and cranky lock. How it got packed among articles which had been so carefully chosen was an ironical mystery. Ironical, because the obsolete pouch had proved much more valuable than so much he had then thought essential, like the rain-ruined government pamphlets or the never-planted seeds.

He slipped the rawhide strips attached to the handle over his shoulder, put the other five shells, his knife, and flint in the case, and tied the substitute straps. Man the survivor went forth to hunt dangling a briefcase.

The dull, high fog was chilly. If he knew how to make mortar without cement he could have built a fireplace inside the shelter.

Warm. Cozy. Cook in the rain. Shelter, they called it honestly; neither would say it was anything more.

The never-accounted-for pile of logs, all roughly of a size, had arbitrarily determined the site when he and Erika had come upon it at the end of the flight. If either of them had been inclined to superstition (some of his old paternal pride in her warmed fleetingly) they might have taken it as some kind of sign. He had laboriously felled and cut and trimmed an equal number to make the three and a half walls. Neither smooth nor snug nor square. The logs had looked so true it hadn't seemed possible they could fail to fit neatly together like children's blocks. But when one was laid on another after the ends were notched to interlock, the unnoticed swellings around the knots, the faint twists and curves, made large uneven gaps.

He'd known what to do: one filled the chinks with moss, and daubed heavy mud in and over the cracks to make a tight surface. Unfortunately the moss always dried up and blew away, the sandy mud refused to cling and dropped off persistently as it was applied. In the end Erika had stuffed in grass; as the logs weathered and shrank she used more grass.

He followed the stream upward for a short distance, then struck eastward between the redwoods. People who used to write stories about what would happen instinctively agreed with Erika, leaping for shock-cushioning fancies. Like living in deserted mansions, enjoying unlimited supplies of canned goods from abandoned markets, banding together with like-minded survivors—one of them always a reservoir of esoteric knowledge about the economy of the American Indian, agronomic chemistry, textile manufacture—to rebuild civilization. Limited imagination, unable to envisage realities.

After they had arrived ("Any further will be too close to Monterey . . .") and hidden the station wagon, obliterating the tire-marks for the half mile from the highway, they listened daily to the car's radio. Months earlier he had told them just what was bound to occur after It happened. Molly—he barely stopped himself thinking poor Molly—had been so incredulous, even when

they were fighting the rest of the refugee traffic to escape, but the announcer sounded as though he were repeating what Mr. Jimmon had said in their living room. Erika never remembered the accuracy of his predictions now.

The redwoods gave place to live oak, pine and some trees he had not been able to identify. Then the growth ended abruptly on the edge of rolling hills where the grass had barely begun to fade. Had he been wrong in not trying to corral some of the cattle then roaming here? The overwhelming difficulties of catching, herding, penning, caring for them came back to impress him anew. He had done the only feasible thing: shot those he could, one at a time. (Erika's sneer at pioneers who shot cows was unjust; she ate her share of the meat.) Now they'd disappeared. All.

As Erika thought, into a herd salvaged by someone interested in more than today's loot and food? The news they listened to so raptly denied the likelihood. The gutted, uninhabitable shell of Los Angeles had become a trap; not only radiation sickness, but typhoid, meningitis, unnamed plagues—Mr. Jimmon wouldn't have been surprised if one were cholera—swirled among those not in the first wave of escapers. Following the earlier fugitives they brought their sores and lesions to attack a surrounding population already disorganized and hungry. The attempt to set up dislocation camps ended when the national guardsmen were massacred by the frenzied victims.

The radio had been detailed and explicit about destruction in Europe and Asia. ("Eleven classified bombs destroyed Leningrad last night. . . ." "Nothing remains of Marseilles except" "While Copenhagen and Bristol were being reduced, Archangel and Warsaw . . .") News of disaster at home had to be deduced from grudging hints. Chicago and Detroit were hit the same day; the destruction of New York had gone on interminably. One had to piece the cautious items together to begin to understand.

It must be a couple of years since he'd seen any cattle. Miles away, how many he could only guess, were ranch house, stables, corrals, outbuildings. Beyond them were thousands of other grazing acres. The heroic fictional man (*homo gersnbacchae*) would

have found the house, rounded up the cattle, started all over.

And been a fine target for the first passing looters.

When San Francisco went there had been ways of estimating the extent of disaster. Normally bare State Highway 1 suddenly became burdened with southbound traffic. He had been sure their hideout would be invaded and overrun, but motorists apparently thought only of getting as far away as possible. What would they do after another hundred miles, when they came within the radius of devastation made by those escaping from Los Angeles? Turn for the Pacific like lemmings?

The radio could get only one station after that. For perhaps a month they heard from Monterey that disaster was being coped with; it would be no time before complete network service was restored; meanwhile the civilian population was not to panic or heed enemy-spread rumors. Tabulation of dislocated persons was going on rapidly; lost friends and relatives were being listed; reunion would be sped by calmness and fortitude.

Something moved in the grass to his right. A rabbit? Wildcat? The breeze? Standing still, he raised the shotgun level with his hip. There was no further movement. Wariness? Illusion?

Keeping the gun firmly at the ready, he moved one foot ahead of the other. The grass was tall; it was barely possible some large, dangerous animal crouched, waiting to spring. His eyes strained ahead to locate the exact spot, to fire at the betraying sign. He lifted his left foot, set it down silently, lifted the right.

He was thus off-balance for a fraction of a second when the largest jackrabbit he'd ever seen bounded out of the grass in frantic hops. Even as he brought the shotgun to his shoulder he knew he couldn't possibly hit the leaping creature. Stumbling, he willed his finger to relax on the trigger, but it was too late. He fell heavily, sprawling; the gun roared next to his ear, at the same time he felt the briefcase twist and break open.

The grass was not yet dry enough to be brittle; for a long moment he lay where he'd fallen, unwilling to struggle. Another irreplaceable shell wasted, another simple task bungled.

Mr. Jimmon lay quietly, thinking. Civilization, no matter how

you defined it, was a delicate, interdependent mechanism. Suppose he had been, not an insurance broker but an Admirable Jimmon, the Elizabethan universal man born out of time: crack shot, first-class woodsman, mechanic, improviser, chemist, physicist, farmer. Would anything have been qualitatively different? Wasn't it an imperative that all men had to sink to a common level before there could be a new raising? To believe as he had believed, or thought he believed, that it was possible to preserve in himself and Erika—and the boy? that was a nice question—an isolated vestige of the decencies, amenities, attitudes, techniques of mid-Twentieth Century life without a supporting network of goods and services, mines and factories, was a delusion. A remnant of the primitive idea that man could get help from spirits or a watchful god to overcome obstacles, as though man had anything to depend on but mankind. If mankind sank, man sank with it; the variations in depth were insignificant.

He had known this all along; they had all known it all along. Wendell had asked promptly, "You mean we can steal cars and things?" All collapse was total collapse. Hiding from the looters and rapists—the rebuilders of tomorrow—did not preserve an enclave from a lost world, it merely kept the present one a little more, an infinitesimally little more, brutal than it might have been.

He sighed and picked himself up. Another shell wasted, another step closer to the moment when he would have no shotgun, no weapon at all except the two bows and arrows. Even on the terms he had originally imagined saving himself and Erika he was failing; each wasted shell narrowed the gap between them and other survivors.

The briefcase . . . ? He looked down; it lay on the grass, shoulderstrap and jury-straps broken through. He picked it up; the knife and flint were inside, the shells were spilled around.

Four of them. The fifth must have bounced out, it could not be far away. Methodically, tenderly he put everything back in; careful not to move his feet he searched for the missing shell. It must not be lost.

Priceless artifact of brass and copper and paper, lead and gun-

powder. A halfwit, an idiot who could no more understand an actuarial table than the second law of thermodynamics or the tactics of the battle of Salamis, could refill the ejected shells with some sort of makeshift (what was gunpowder? saltpeter and . . . ?) and preserve his shorter distance from the bow-and-arrow users that much longer. The halfwit would do it in order to blow out the brains of some other savage who had a hide or a piece of meat or a woman he coveted. Whereas the man who took thought for tomorrow was unable to safeguard the heritage of yesterday.

He squatted on his heels, splaying his fingers through the grass. Give it up? Write off two shells on the jackrabbit? Accept the double, no, triple loss?

"Got to find it."

Boxes and boxes of shells lined the shelves of hardware stores in a hundred towns and villages. Except that they no longer did. If he had not been forethoughtful, provident, he too might have all the weapons and ammunition he needed for the taking. He had been too quick, too intelligent to survive.

Staring down into the grass, he stared back into the past. The vitality he'd had when he and Molly, Jir, Erika, and Wendell had started off in the station wagon, gaining new force with the sloughing off of Molly and the boys, reaching its peak with the attainment of the hiding place and the almost mystic propriety of the relationship with Erika, had really seemed to change him from man the commuter and taxpayer to man the lair finder, man the dwelling maker, man the provider. How long had this impetus lasted? A few months? Less than a year, certainly; it was long gone before Erika found herself with child.

It had begun to fade when Monterey went off the air; perhaps with the final realization that there was no longer any faint hope something would be spared, that he was truly on his own now. What had happened to Monterey? Or, for that matter, to Salinas and Carmel and Fort Ord? There had been no bombing; they were close enough to have seen the flash. Besides, long before actual transmission ceased he'd had the queer feeling the broadcast

was . . . *hollow*. A one-man operation perhaps (was that possible?), from a ghost town. A madman pretending that the little city still existed, that people walked its streets, patronized its stores, rode its busses, slept in its beds, docked ships at its wharves. The local news might have been true; it might equally well have been fiction. No hint of an exodus was given but no voice other than the announcer's was heard relaying world news (how did it come in? was it true? its vagueness was equally characteristic of genuineness or falsity) and government directives, some of them recognizably months old. Then one day no call letters were transmitted; there was no scratched record of the anthem, no news, no hearty signing off. Nothing but silence that day. And the next. And the next.

Had the power failed? Or the engineer finally given up his deception—if it was? Or succumbed to illness? Erika impulsively had wanted him to drive the station wagon north and find out. Her childish obstinacy had ignored his adult reasoning; for the first time he saw signs in her of her mother's blindness to facts. She could not argue with his deduction of the dangers, she merely repeated that they ought to get in the car and see for themselves.

Even when he pointed out that they no longer had a spare tire she perversely turned the situation around: All the more reason; they could find a way of fixing it there. He'd been appalled—no other word fitted—appalled at her unrealistic attitude.

He had not understood how strong her obsession with the idea of a makeshift residuary civilization had grown until he discovered she'd been turning the radio on four or five times a day. "Don't you realize you're draining the battery?"

She had answered carelessly, "Oh, we can always start the motor and run it up again."

He'd tried to make her understand, to see the picture whole. About two gallons left in the gas tank. Vital for an emergency; irreplaceable. (On her terms, supposing her daydream true, he had no money to buy gas; he'd given the entire contents of his wallet, the 200 hundred-dollar bills, to Molly in that final gesture. And since her daydream was illusion there was no gas to be had anyway.)

He had known wry triumph when the battery finally failed and the radio no longer sucked in empty static. The station wagon had become a useless relic. "But we can push it and start the motor that way. Of course if you'd done as I wanted . . ."

Push the inert monster over half a mile of trackless, bumpy ground, obstructed with fallen boughs and rotted stumps. Impossible. Difficult even for five or six husky men. Out of the question. "Besides, the tires are soft."

Her answer had been to pump up all four with the hand pump. He felt both admiration and irritation; perseverance in a stupid cause. Naturally they couldn't budge the wagon over the first hump (he had not held back an ounce of effort, even knowing the futility of it). She had not been stopped by the failure; somewhere she'd heard of starting a car by jacking up a rear wheel and spinning it while in gear.

For months it had stayed petrified in that canine position. He had given up as soon as he realized it wouldn't work, but she spent hours vainly twirling. It was a long time before her thrice daily attempts became daily, and the daily weekly. If he remembered, her pregnancy was well advanced before she gave up entirely.

"No salvation by mechanical means," he muttered. Only by dogged reliance on his own will. That was why he couldn't give up his search for the shotgun shell. It was not only priceless in itself; it was a symbol of his determination to resist reduction to the primitive level as long as possible.

What had he expected? The swiftly built prototypical cabin, the dammed stream, the planted vegetable garden, slowly extending, the ownerless herds coaxed into control and redomesticity, the masterly defense against marauders, discovery of others rejecting barbarism, the joining of forces—couples and young children only, no single males in any circumstances—under his leadership which couldn't help but be acknowledged after his single-handed mastering of obstacles, the final triumph when the group at last emerged from hiding and established themselves openly in an abandoned village or town? Romantic.

His fingers touched the ridged base of a shell. Lucky, was his first thought; incredibly, unbelievably lucky. To find the shell which might have hopped and rolled anywhere. Not the needle in the haystack, perhaps, but the shell in the grass.

Not luck. There wasn't any. Persistence.

His finger found the hole in the shell's mouth. The used one ejected from the gun.

Mr. Jimmon sat down on the grass. This was no absolute tragedy, no cause for final despair. Two shells had been wasted instead of one; the toll of fruitless pursuit had been doubled. He still had—how many? Enough for a careful year yet, perhaps. Not despair; discouragement.

He had been foolish and adventurous to start out so late after game; it had been a gesture to show—himself or Erika—that he was the Admirable Jimmon after all. Pride goeth before an empty belly.

What was the difference between x shells and $x-1$ shells? Why does a fireman wear red suspenders? "Put it down to experience," he muttered, tucking the disabled briefcase under one arm and the shotgun under the other.

Back at the stream he paused judicially. This was one job he had no doubts about. By moving the soft dirt—it would be better to make some sort of reinforcement of brush and stones on the downstream face first—he could build up his dam on either side of the flow to the required height and thickness before interfering with the course itself. Deepening to one side above the upstream face would give him a shallow reservoir where the water could be diverted while he feverishly plugged the bottom of the outlet. Then he could keep ahead of the rising level until the dam was high as he wanted it.

It was a good project; he'd put it off no longer. Begin at dawn tomorrow, jumping up without admonition, hurrying eagerly. When the dam was finished he'd make the shelter into a proper cabin. They would sink no further; from now on, no matter how slightly, their progress would be upward. Recivilization.

His ears, adjusted to the accustomed noises, the insects' scraping, the whirr and call of birds, the frogs' croak, the distant surf,

the brook's purl, caught the sounds of Erika and the boy. He would say nothing of his determination. Match her fantasy of survivors with the reality of their own survival.

Instead of stepping gingerly from stone to stone, he leaped across the stream and walked briskly toward the shelter. Erika had a good fire going and was settling the kettle on top of it. Blacken it worse. Told her often enough about waiting for coals.

"Did you get anything, Dad?"

Something not quite right in her voice. The question should have been put sharply in a faintly contemptuous tone, with shadings of irritation and tolerance. Not with an undercurrent of . . . what? Non-recognition bothered him momentarily.

"Nhnh-nhnh." He put away the shotgun carefully. "Straps broken on the briefcase again," he called over his shoulder, taking out the shells, knife and flint. "Try to sew it stronger this time, ay?"

"If I get the chance. Brought back some abalone for you."

If she doesn't leave the undersized ones alone there soon won't be any at all. Have to go way out; dive for them. I couldn't. Univalves; all muscle to hold the half-shell to rocks. Expand outward, opening to suck in food; knife slips, fingers caught, the shell clamps back against the rock self-protectively; drowned.

Complaint and fear threaded through his gratefulness. Dutiful daughter; I have nourished my father. Lenore? Electra? Somebody. Erika's breasts were small; did this have anything to do with the boy's poor start? Think not; Molly had never been able to nurse for long. Pediatricians; supplementary feedings; formulas. Erika had had to; no choice.

He accepted the saucerlike shells, noting with surprised pleasure that she had cooked them for him. He drew in the meaty smell, scooped the rubbery flesh out and chewed thoughtfully. Better pounded; not so essential in these immature. . . . Careful my tooth; not that side.

"My, going fishing right away," he announced, mouth full. "Why?"

Startled, he paused in his chewing. "Why?" It was a pointless

question. Why am I going fishing. To catch fish. "Duty to provide," he mumbled jocularly.

She stuck a testing finger into the kettle. "Duty," she echoed thoughtfully, withdrawing the kettle from the fire. She knelt, letting her hair fall forward into the water. Both Mr. Jimmon and the boy watched.

She sopped and wrung, dipped again; cupped her hands and poured the water over her scalp, rubbing it in. Over and over. How can she shampoo without soap, thought Mr. Jimmon; and what for? Same reason I shave; preserve the amenities. Still. Odd thing to do in the middle of the day.

She rose to her feet and began massaging the loose strands between her palms. "Duty," she said; "why?"

"Why?" For a moment he didn't understand the connection. "Oh. Responsibility. Biological. Social."

She held a handful of dripping hair up and away from her face to peer at him. "And Mom?" she asked levelly. "Wendy, Jir and Mom?"

Impulse. The impulse at the exact moment of opportunity at the end of a day when inhibitions are relaxed. He could never have forced Molly and the boys out of the car, could never have driven off with a startled Erika beside him if he had had to state anything, justify himself, argue. He could not have done it if they had even been in sight, if their knowledge of his betrayal and abandonment had been coincidental with the act instead of delayed till after accomplishment.

What was the relevance of all this now? If Erika didn't know these things, how could he possibly communicate them to her? Certainly there was no way in which he could re-create, even if he wanted to, the peculiar emotional atmosphere of that day of escape.

It was not the arraignment which astonished him so much as the "Mom." From that electric moment of awareness in the station wagon, Erika had spoken aloofly of "Mother." This sudden reversion to the locution of childhood must mean . . . what?

Guilt had become so pervasive a word in the books Molly used to read it had no meaning at all.

Carefully he said, "Survival would have been impossible. I also owed a duty to you and to myself." For a strange moment he felt it was the man of eight years back talking; D. A. Jimmon who had a home in Malibu and an office on Spring Street. "Besides," he added weakly, "I gave her all our money. Twenty thousand dollars."

"Money you thought would never buy anything again," she commented neutrally, working vigorously on her hair.

"And still think. Know, in fact. That's not the point. Molly could never see that I might possibly be right; *she* was convinced it had and would always have value."

She divided her still damp hair with quick, sure motions and began braiding one side. "They would have been quite impossible," she admitted dispassionately. "But that isn't the point either. If you hadn't been ruthless—"

"Unsentimental," corrected Mr. Jimmon.

"Unsentimental, then. You had to be, in order to survive."

"For us to survive." But he was pleased with her understanding.

She finished braiding one side and started on the other. He waited for her to continue. She took both braids and wound them around her head, tying them with a bit of torn blue cotton. "I don't see . . ." he began at last, puzzled.

"Take the boy along with you, will you?"

"What?" he asked, more confused than before.

"Fishing. Didn't you say you were going fishing right away?"

"Oh. Yes. But . . ." He looked at the empty abalone shell in his hand, turned it over and inspected without seeing the delicately stitched row of blow holes. "You want me to take him along?"

She'd never asked him before. Have to carry the boy at least part of the way. Nuisance. But she was right, of course. Have to begin teaching him.

He rose. "Well. All right."

"Don't want to go back fishing."

"But we weren't fishing before, dear. Just looking for shellfish and stranded crabs. Dad'll take you really fishing."

"Don't want to go."

Undersized for four. If he was four. What standard did he have for comparison? Faded memories of Jir and Wendell and children seen-unseen on the street. Boy was probably exactly average. Even his health, considering the diet. *Sickly* was only a revulsion, or a wish he might have been sturdier, brighter than most. The Nineteenth Century folktales opposed to historical knowledge. Ptolemies and Incas. Or didn't the Incas? Think they did.

Erika put her arms around the boy and kissed him. None of the Jimmons were demonstrative. "Go with Dad," she said. "I want you to."

"Come on," suggested Mr. Jimmon, not unkindly. "Come on if you're coming."

"He needs eggs," said Erika; "milk really, but there's no milk. And greens; the dandelions are pretty well all gone now, but there's other stuff around here. You can tell by chewing on them raw if they're good to eat. And warm covers at night."

"You haven't done badly with him, Erika," said Mr. Jimmon. "Fact is, I'd say you'd done very well."

Lack of the briefcase was a nuisance. He would have to take knife, flint-and-steel and string in his other hand; forget extra gut, hooks, sinkers. "Come on," he repeated; "carry you piggyback."

The arms around his neck seemed frail; certainly his weight was light. If I could have gentled a cow the milk would have made all the difference. Perhaps even now—was that what she was getting at? Maybe when the dam was finished. The cattle might not have strayed too far or learned too great a wariness.

"Luck, Dad," Erika called out, with the same strange undertone in her voice. "Don't let him get cold."

"Mm." He was partly choked by the boy's clutch.

He jogged thoughtfully downhill. Despite his efforts and warnings a definite path had been worn from the shelter to the highway. He would have to conceal it again as best he could, with pine needles and debris. Speak to her again of the seriousness of ex-

posing themselves so. If only he could regain communication with her.

"Why do I have to go back fishing?"

"Not exactly have to. Erika thought you're getting big now; time to learn things."

"Don't want to."

"All right," he agreed absently. A strange smell drifted under his nostrils. Familiar, but not smelled recently. Acrid, faint, almost sweet; not a skunk far off, though. "You don't have to. Just watch me catch fish for us all."

"Don't want to watch."

Annoying little . . . No wonder Erika wanted to fob him off for the afternoon. He tried to adjust the boy's position on his back to make carrying a little easier, but his filled hands thwarted the attempt. "Try not to pull back against my neck," he urged.

Even before he stepped out from between the trees into the thick brush smothering what had once been the shoulders and ditches of the highway, he knew something was wrong. Was the unfamiliar familiar smell stronger here? "Shsh; quiet," he whispered.

"Don't—"

"Shsh!" he hissed.

He waited silently to see if the foreign presence, if that was what it was, would betray itself before he went forward into the open. Imagination? Hunch? Worth going back for the rifle?

"I—"

"Shsh, I told you. Mean it."

The trees were as they should be: forbearing, imperturbably, unindicative. Whatever was wrong—if indeed there was anything wrong and his startle had not been completely unwarranted—had not touched the redwoods.

Nor the brush, he thought as he pushed his way through it, deliberately avoiding the path Erika had carelessly trampled. The upstart growth was arrogant. "No one been here," he muttered under his breath.

"What you say, Dad?"

"Shsh, shsh. Quiet."

"But . . ."

"Be qui—!"

It was the road itself which told everything. Even before he stepped out on its surface, before he read what was so plain to see, Mr. Jimmon felt the contraction of dread in his chest.

The highway was not as he had known it six years earlier when he had grunted to Erika, sleepy and awed, "Guess this is the place."

It was no longer a clean strip of nearly white concrete worm-patterned with black tar. Leaves and sand had blown across it steadily in the ceaseless wind from the ocean, to be caught and held at the near edge, building back a dune to snare the earth that was stamped and filtered into it by the rain. The compound was not disturbed; the concrete was buried now, anchored under ever-accumulating topsoil on which sparse grass and undernourished plants grew thinly but stubbornly, their taproots stunted by the slab below. The highway was still clearly defined, but no longer as what it was; now it was only a sick swathe through the vigorous brush and woods.

But the swathe was not as it had been yesterday and the day before and last week and last year. The track of the interloper was plain and bold to see, insolently plowed through the soft detritus, imperiously proclaiming its roughshod advance on the vulnerable mass.

He put a foot on the violated surface. The signs were plain, too plain. The ultimate meaning was obscure, obscure as the fate they represented, but the immediate story was crystal clear.

Without any doubt the plump-to-plump U marks, coming from nowhere, going nowhere, were the tiretreads of a jeep. They impressed themselves on the thin soil; man's insigne on top of nature's futile try at blotting out man's insignia.

The jeep, with treads still thick enough to leave so firmly a distinguishing mark, was—what? Not, certainly, utter disorganization. Not after six years. Whoever rode that jeep might be

marauder and pillager, but as between them (or him) and Mr. Jimmon, it was the jeep which represented civilization and Mr. Jimmon savagery.

"Why you don't go on, huh, Dad?"

"Mmmm," answered Mr. Jimmon perfunctorily.

Warily he moved forward. Neanderthaler sniffing the spoor of Cro-Magnon. Friday astonished by the print of Crusoe. What was implicitly engraved on the dirt? A jeep, yes; but what else? Who? Man or woman? Three or four men? Men of good will, seeking their fellows? Or fleeing from them? What was the personal history of the jeep's occupants? What had they been six years ago, and for the six years past? Were they reconcilers or destroyers?

Mr. Stanley, I believe. Believe what? Believe anything.

Out of nowhere into nothing. Was it? No question the tracks were not quite in the center of what had once been a highway, premier numbered, paved, celebrated, maintained and budgeted for by the sovereign state of California. By ever so slight a deviation, but consistently, quite as though it were done by habit rather than intent, the tracks bore to the west side.

West side. Rule of the road, except in the unlikely event the jeep driver was an Englishman or New Zealander inexplicably traveling an unpopular American highway, meant west was right side. The jeep came from the north and was heading south. Logic.

Still cautiously, as though the tracks themselves could suddenly materialize the vehicle and its occupants, he moved across the road and peered at the surface. Abruptly he spoke over his shoulder at the boy. "Were these marks here when you and Erika came home?"

"Huh?"

Patiently he repeated the question.

"I want to go home now."

Had she warned him to reveal nothing? Would he have understood? It was a disadvantage not to be able to see the child's face—but could he have divined anything from it anyway? And if she had wanted him not to see the tracks wouldn't she have made an

attempt to persuade him not to come down here? Was the boy intelligent enough for deception?

He trod delicately along the road's edge; the ground was not quite soft enough to show her footprints. Besides, if she had seen the tracks and not wanted him to know she could easily have avoided walking on them. Why should he suspect her of hiding anything?

The ill-concealed excitement. The novel request to take the boy along.

Why? He would have expected her to rush back with the news, exultant. It must seem she had been right about survivors, he wrong; why didn't she triumph? Or supposing she had had second thoughts of the intruders' goodwill, wouldn't she yet have wanted to tell him of their existence?

He stepped high over the impressions. Could they have been made after she returned? Not only was such pat timing highly doubtful, it left her elation unaccounted for. Nor was it reasonable to think the tracks had been made before she'd gone down to the ocean that morning; no one would drive a road so long unused for the first time at night. Logic said the jeep must have passed on its southward way while Erika searched the rocks for shellfish.

Had its occupants seen her? There was no indication from the tire marks of a stop and start. He could take it for granted their existence was still concealed; unless the jeep returned it might remain so.

He smothered the impulse to turn back. If she had suppressed a knowledge, mention would only harden whatever curious reaction she might have had. And if, improbably, she did not know of the jeep's passage, nothing was to be gained by telling her. Yet.

There was no further point in staring down at the tracks. Reluctantly he faced away from them and walked through the thin cover which ended in sand-rooted pine and cypress. "Have to let you down now," he said over his shoulder; "hold on to my hand going between these rocks and we'll be all right."

"Can't."

"'Can't'? Why can't you?"

"You got your fishing rod in that hand."

Mr. Jimmon shifted the rod into the hand already encumbered by knife and flint and took the boy's free one. Jir—David Alonzo Jimmon junior—would be twenty-three now.

The tide was low and still going out. Spume gurgled in the spongy rocks; subduedly now, explosively at high tide. "You sit down here," he directed, putting his gear in a safe place, "and watch."

Carefully he picked his way over the craggy strand to an exposed point where the water alternately sucked and smashed at clusters of dark, dripping mussels. A long slimy tail of green seaweed puffed and dwindled like wet wool. Mr. Jimmon selected a promising hump of large shells, down low, and pulled. The Pacific, resenting the impudence, covered them promptly and wet him to the knees. The boy laughed.

He went back and got his knife. As the next wave receded he stabbed, sawed and hacked at the tough fibers to which the mussels clung. After several more wettings he succeeded, panting, in retrieving a good-sized clump. Retreating, he opened the largest shell, cut a piece of the soft orange meat and gently worked it on his hook. He adjusted the float, and going forward, cast out as best he could with a light sinker and dangling line. The float bobbed some ten feet out.

Stepping back to where the boy was playing with a tiny fiddler crab in a rocky tidepool, he gently reeled out line. The float moved erratically seaward. Glancing over his shoulder he confirmed his certainty that this spot was invisible from any part of the road.

Currents tugged moodily at the rod's tip, nodding it gravely, twitching it, pulling it slowly down and letting it slowly come back. The degree of civilization in man was inversely proportionate to his preoccupation with the business of getting food. For him it was an all day chore, and an unavoidably direct one: he could perform no act—like writing insurance or welding aluminum—which could eventually be translated into calories. His relation with what he ate was always intimate.

For the jeep riders it must be immediate too; their removal from

his savage status was made clear when you considered how little time they must have to spend food-getting. They were the sportsmen who could spot game and bring it down as they sped along; they were the lords of survival who could find the still intact stores of canned goods and gorge voluptuously on such rare delicacies as solid-pack tomatoes or evaporated milk.

The tug on the rod was suddenly sharp; the tip bent, the float went under, bobbed back, moved in a swift arc. Mr. Jimmon pulled enough to set the hook, and reeled in steadily, faintly excited by the struggle. "Bass," he grunted with satisfaction.

"Oooh, big fish," said the boy as the line, having been drawn in till the float came against the eye, was flipped overhead with a gray and brown calico writhing on the hook. He laid the rod down precisely, detached the fish, left it flopping on the rocks, baited the hook again, cast, played the float seaward, caught the rod between his knees, took up the fish under the gills, scaled it despite its throes, gutted and cleaned it, cut off the head and threw the offal into the water.

"Think you could do that?"

"Don't want to."

Mr. Jimmon pulled in another bass, slightly smaller, and threaded both on his string. Then he lost his bait. The tide was turning now; the float no longer eased its way outward but bobbed back and forth close to the spot where the cast had taken it. "But I have to get another fish," he explained. "One for you and one for me and one for Erika."

"Don't want fish. I want to go home."

Home, thought Mr. Jimmon; these are the standards of the rising generation. Must do something about fixing up the shelter. Jeep drivers can occupy luxury hotels—spider webs and neglect-yellowed sheets included. Those not radioactive or preempted by other jeep drivers. Which is the way to civilization? Unless Erika is right and the jeep drivers are just looking for recruits to utopia. Jeep eat jeep.

"Just one more," he said.

The tide began coming in more swiftly. Reluctantly he wound

up his line, removed the float, lowered the leader and cast out again for bottom fish. If nothing else he might get a small shovel-nose, whose tail made good eating, boiled.

"Good eating?" he repeated aloud. "I'm damned sick of fish. All kinds."

"What you say, Dad?"

"Nothing. Nothing."

If the briefcase hadn't broken he'd have brought along a heavier sinker. This one was far too light; he could feel it rolling and tumbling over the bottom with each swell. Bait probably gone by now too; ought to pull up and put on gristle. Fish didn't care so much for it, but it stayed on.

He wound up slowly; the line grew taut. Angrily he gave slack, hoping the ebb would pull the sinker or hook out of whatever it was caught on. He gave lots of slack, then reeled in gently, steadily. Again the line tightened.

The impulse to jerk, to try to snap it loose was almost irresistible, but as with the shotgun shells the thought of the diminishing store made him unnaturally prudent. (The jeep riders could be extravagant; the solitary Eskimo had to cherish his solitary possession.) If he had not cast out from a point there might have been a way of getting to seaward of the snagged tackle.

A roller smashed against the rocks and the spray stung his face. If he didn't get it loose soon it would be hopelessly caught. Or the line would fray through. He gave ample slack, hoping the big wave's backwash might take the sinker with it. But when he reeled up, the line was still tight.

"Another one gone," he mourned. He let the line out for a last time, allowed it to lie limp in the foam, reeled in steadily against the ebb. The line pulled, he pulled. Then he wound up the broken line, shorn of leader, hook and sinker.

"Come on, we'll go home."

He gathered his knife, flint-and-steel, float, the two bass and the clump of mussels. Steamed, they were tasty enough.

"Piggyback. I want to ride home piggyback."

"All right," said Mr. Jimmon wearily. "Climb on."

When the lead sinkers were all gone he could use nuts from the station wagon. They should last his lifetime if he could get them off; before then his lines would be rotted through. He had been provident and thought of the future, but apparently he'd not thought far enough.

One could almost sink into believing in some malicious design. The final irresponsibility of shifting cause and effect onto the shoulders of devils or gods. The retreat from payment for mistakes or rewards for intelligence. The Lord is my shepherd because I have the brains of a sheep.

He trudged over the rocks and sand, the boy heavy and wearisome now. Nearing the highway he paused, watchful, like a dog scenting. No alien sights or sounds disturbed him. The faint smell of gasoline—was it his imagination? The parallel ruts lay stolid, unchurned; there were no others following or coming back.

Stepping across them again he peered southward. Savior or destroyer? Mystery was danger; knowledge, the old cliché had it, was power. The presence of the tracks resolved nothing; neither Erika nor he had been proven finally right or wrong. But whatever the character of the jeep's occupants, crude or gentle, sage or bumpkin, they portended no good to him. They represented a line of development in which he had no place.

Suddenly his depression lifted. Cro-Magnon had not fathered modern man after all. There was survival and there were the blind alleys of evolution. There was no guarantee that by the standards which ultimately counted the jeep represented superiority and he inferiority. Or more aptly, fitness and unfitness. Tomorrow he would work on the dam. When that was finished he would make the shelter into a genuine cabin. The boy was four; soon he could be taught to read. For that matter there was much he could teach Erika.

He had been supine; he acknowledged it freely. But from now on things would be different. Perhaps he had needed the shock of the jeep to shake him back into struggling. Force himself to learn to do the things for which he had no talent.

He took even more care than usual to avoid the scuffed path.

Once the dam was built he could utilize the small clear patches for cultivation. Though the seeds were ruined he might still search out domesticated plants gone wild and coax them back.

He had known the looters and ravishers would come; it was to avoid them he had the station wagon packed and waiting against the day of necessity. But wasn't it true he had also foretold, dimly perhaps, the jeep and the way of life represented by the jeep? He had built no mammoth concrete shelter underground, nor had he tried to find refuge on some remote Pacific island. His had been the middle, sensible course, as befitted a survivor and the prototype of survivors.

In time, might it not even be possible that the mutual reserve and distrust which had grown up between himself and Erika would dissolve? That they were man and woman was far less important than that they were father and daughter.

She was not outside the shelter, nor was the fire going. "Erika," he called, hoping she had already mended the briefcase. "Erika?" "Erika," echoed the boy.

Mr. Jimmon eased him down from his back; put the fish and mussels next to the fireplace. He laid his rod beside the stream, unreeling all of the line that had been dampened, washing the salt water off carefully. Then he looped it loosely over the bushes to dry. Only then did he go inside. "Erika?"

He took a handful of the dry moss kept in reserve and went back to the fireplace. Careless of her to let it go out that way, knowing from experience how long it took to make a new one. On the fourth try the spark struck from the flint-and-steel made a filament of moss glow; he blew it quickly into flame and fed it slowly with crisp pine needles. A quick start for once.

When the fire was established he added small brush and laid on three medium-sized boughs. He scooped up a small quantity of water into the bottom of the kettle and dumped in the mussels. Then he set the two bass as close to the fire as he could without danger of their scorching.

"The hunter home from the hill," he muttered, returning to

the shelter. Her watch was gone from the accustomed place. Now why would she . . . ? The briefcase lay on the ground, unmended.

The boy came in and stood beside him. "I'm hungry now. Where's Erika?"

"In a minute," he answered; "in a minute."

"Hungry," repeated the boy.

Reluctantly Mr. Jimmon began his search. Rifle and shotgun were intact in their hiding places. So was the other fishing rod, something no one bent on robbery would have missed. And the two steel bows. He hesitated before looking further.

The revolver's cache was empty, and the three separate repositories for its cartridges had been cleaned out. There was no possibility of doubting. There really never had been. Duty. Pity in her voice under the elation. Ruthlessness-unsentimentality.

Mr. Jimmon spoke gently. "Come on, Eric. There's a fish for you and one for me; by the time they're gone the mussels will be done."

It was the first time, so far as he could remember, that he'd called or even thought of the boy by name. Needs eggs and greens; warm covers at night.

"Where's Erika? I want Erika."

"I'm afraid Erika has gone away for a while," said Mr. Jimmon soothingly. "Looking for something. You and I will have to make out as best we can without her. Come on now Eric, eat your fish; tomorrow we'll look for gulls' eggs. And there might be berries not too far away."

Mr. Jimmon regarded his own fish with distaste. His tooth had finally begun to ache. Badly.

In which the bachelor sage of Strawberry Hill reveals himself, almost two hundred years ago, as one of the pioneers of interplanetary love.

Saturnian Celia

by Horace Walpole

Extracts from a letter to the Rev. William Mason (1725–1797)

[May, 1774]

. . . If I was as good a poet as you are, I would immediately compose an idyl, or an elegy, the scene of which would be laid in Saturn or Jupiter; and then, instead of a niggardly soliloquy by the light of a single moon I would describe a night illuminated by four or five moons at least, and they should be all in a perpendicular or horizontal line, according as Celia's eyes (who probably in that country has at least two pairs) are disposed in longitude or latitude. You must allow that this system would diversify poetry amazingly.—And then Saturn's belt! which . . . is not round the planet's waist, like the shingles; but is a globe of crystal that encloses the whole orb, as you may have seen an enamelled watch in a case of glass. . . .

Pray send me an eclogue directly upon this plan; and I give you leave to adopt my idea of Saturnian Celias having their everything quadrupled—which would form a much more entertaining rhapsody than Swift's thought of magnifying or diminishing the species in his *Gulliver*. How much more execution a fine woman could do with two pair of *piercers*! or four! and how much longer the honeymoon would last, if both the sexes have (as no doubt they have) four times the passions, and four times the means of gratifying them!

I have opened new worlds to you. . . . Dryden himself would have talked nonsense and, I fear, indecency, on my plan; but you are too good a divine, I am sure, to treat my quadruple love but platonically. In Saturn, notwithstanding their glass-case, they are supposed to be very cold; but platonic love of itself produces frigid

conceits enough, and you need not augment the dose.—But I will not dictate. The subject is new; and you, who have so much imagination, will shoot far beyond me. . . . Good night! I am going to bed.—Mercy on me! if I should dream of Celia with four times the usual attractions!

Much has been written about flying saucers—ranging from serious reporting on unexplained flying objects through wildly improbable speculation to pure crackpot nonsense. But the most unlikely subject takes on new meaning when exposed to Theodore Sturgeon's truly special talents.

Fear Is a Business

by Theodore Sturgeon

Josephus Macardle Phillipso is a man of destiny and he can prove it. His books prove it. The Temple of Space proves it.

A man of destiny is someone who is forced into things—big things—willy, as the saying goes, nilly. Phillipso, just for example, never meant to get into the Unidentified (except by Phillipso) Aerial Object business. This is to say, he didn't sit down like some of his less honest (according to Phillipso) contemporaries and say "I think I'll sit down and tell some lies about flying saucers and make some money." Everything that happened (Phillipso ultimately believed) just happened, and happened to happen to him. Might have been anybody. Then, what with one thing leading to another the way it does, well, you burn your forearm on an alibi and wind up with a Temple.

It was, on looking back on it (something which Phillipso never does any more), an unnecessary alibi devised for inadequate reasons. Phillipso merely calls the beginnings "inauspicious" and lets it go at that. The fact remains that it all started one night when he tied one on for no special reason except that he had just been paid his forty-eight dollars for writing advertising promotion copy for the Hincty Pincty Value Stores, and excused his absence on the following day with a story about a faulty lead on the spark coil of his car which took him most of the night to locate, and there he was stranded in the hills on the way back from a visit to his aging mother. The next night he did visit his aging mother and on the way back his car unaccountably quit and he spent most of the night fiddling with the electrical system until he dis-

covered, just at dawn, a—well, there it was. At a time like that you just can't tell the truth. And while he was pondering various credible alternatives to veracity, the sky lit up briefly and shadows of the rocks and trees around him grew and slid away and died before he could even look up. It was a temperature inversion or a methane fireball or St. Elmo's fire or maybe even a weather balloon—actually that doesn't matter. He looked up at where it already wasn't, and succumbed to inspiration.

His car was parked on a grassy shoulder in a cut between two bluffs. Thick woods surrounded a small clearing to his right, a sloping glade sparsely studded with almost round maraine boulders, of all sizes. He quickly located three, a foot or so in diameter, equally spaced, and buried to approximately the same depth—i.e., not much, Phillipso being merely an ingenious man, not an industrious one. These three he lifted out, being careful to keep his crepe-soled shoes flat on the resilient grass and to leave as few scuff-marks and indentations as possible. One by one he took the stones into the woods and dropped them into an evacuated foxhole and shoved some dead branches in on top of them. He then ran to his car and from the trunk got a blowtorch which he had borrowed to fix a leak in the sweated joint of a very old-fashioned bathtub in his mother's house, and with it thoroughly charred the three depressions in the ground where the boulders had lain.

Destiny had unquestionably been at work from the time he had beered himself into mendacity forty-eight hours before. But it became manifest at this point, for after Phillipso had licked his forearm lightly with the tongue of flame from the torch, extinguished the same and put it away, a car ground up the hill toward him. And it was not just any car. It belonged to a Sunday supplement feature writer named Penfield who was not only featureless at the moment, but who had also seen the light in the sky a half hour earlier. It may have been Phillipso's intention to drive into town with his story, and back with a reporter and cameraman, all to the end that he could show a late edition to his boss

and explain this second absence. Destiny, however, made a much larger thing of it.

Phillipso stood in the graying light in the middle of the road and flapped his arms until the approaching car stopped. "They," he said hoarsely, "almost killed me."

From then on, as they say in the Sunday supplement business, it wrote itself. Phillipso offered not one blessed thing. All he did was answer questions, and the whole thing was born in the brain of this Penfield, who realized nothing except that here was the ideal interview subject. "Came down on a jet of fire, did it? Oh—*three* jets of fire." Phillipso took him into the glade and showed him the three scorched pits, still warm. "Threaten you, did they? Oh—all Earth. Threatened all Earth." Scribble scribble. He took his own pictures too. "What'd you do, speak right up to them? Hm?" Phillipso said he had, and so it went.

The story didn't make the Sunday supplements, but the late editions, just as Phillipso had planned, but much bigger. So big, as a matter of fact, that he didn't go back to his job at all; he didn't need it. He got a wire from a publisher who wanted to know if he, as a promotion writer, might be able to undertake a book.

He might and he did. He wrote with a crackling facility (*The first word in thrift, the last word in value* was his, and was posted all over the Hincty Pincty chain just as if it meant something) in a style homely as a cowlick and sincere as a banker's name-plate. *The Man Who Saved the Earth* sold two hundred and eighty thousand copies in the first seven months.

So the money started to come in. Not only the book money—the other money. This other money came from the end-of-the-world people, the humanity-is-just-too-wicked people, the save-us-from-the-spacemen folk. Clear across the spectrum, from people who believed that if God wanted us to fly through space we'd have been born with tailfins to people who didn't believe in anything but Russians but would believe anything of them, people said "Save us!" and every crack on the pot dripped gold. Hence the Temple of Space, just to regularize the thing, you know, and

then the lectures, and could Phillipso help it if half the congr—uh, club members called them services?

The sequel happened the same way, just appendixes to the first book, to handle certain statements he had made which some critics said made him fall apart by his own internal evidence. *We Need not Surrender* contradicted itself even more, was a third longer, sold three hundred and ten thousand in the first nine weeks, and brought in so much of that other money that Phillipso registered himself as an Institute and put all the royalties with it. The Temple itself began to show signs of elaboration, the most spectacular piece of which was the war surplus radar basket of a battleship that went round and round all the time. It wasn't connected to a damn thing but people felt that Phillipso had his eyes open. You could see it, on a clear day, from Catalina, especially at night after the orange searchlight was installed to rotate with it. It looked like a cosmic windshield wiper.

Phillipso's office was in the dome under the radar basket, and was reachable only from the floor below by an automatic elevator. He could commune with himself in there just fine, especially when he switched the elevator off. He had a lot of communing to do, too, sometimes detail stuff, like whether he could sustain a rally at the Coliseum and where to apply the ten thousand dollar grant from the Astrological Union which had annoyingly announced the exact size of the gift to the press before sending him the check. But his main preoccupation was another book, or what do I do for an encore? Having said that we are under attack, and then that we can rally and beat 'em, he needed an angle. Something new, preferably born by newsbeat out of cultural terror. And soon, too; his kind of wonder could always use another nine days.

As he sat alone and isolated in the amnion of these reflections, his astonishment can hardly be described at the sound of a dry cough just behind him, and the sight of a short sandy-haired man who stood there. Phillipso might have fled, or leapt at the man's throat, or done any number of violent things besides, but he was

stopped cold by a device historically guaranteed to stem all raging authors: "I have," said the man, holding up one volume in each hand, "read your stuff."

"Oh, really?" asked Phillipso.

"I find it," said the man, "logical and sincere."

Phillipso looked smilingly at the man's unforgettable bland face and his unnoticeable gray suit. The man said, "Sincerity and logic have this in common: neither need have anything to do with truth."

"Who are you," demanded Phillipso immediately, "What do you want and how did you get in here?"

"I am not, as you put it, in here," said the man. He pointed upward suddenly, and in spite of himself Phillipso found his eyes following the commanding finger.

The sky was darkening, and Phillipso's orange searchlight slashed at it with increasing authority. Through the transparent dome, just to the north, and exactly where his visitor pointed, Phillipso saw the searchlight pick out a great silver shape which hovered perhaps fifty feet away and a hundred feet above the Temple. He saw it only momentarily, but it left an afterimage in his retinae like a flashbulb. And by the time the light had circled around again and passed the place, the thing was gone. "I'm in that," said the sandy-haired man. "Here in this room I'm a sort of projection. But then," he sighed, "aren't we all?"

"You better explain yourself," said Phillipso loudly enough to keep his voice from shaking, "or I'll throw you out of here on your ear."

"You couldn't. I'm not here to be thrown." The man approached Phillipso, who had advanced away from his desk into the room. Rather than suffer a collision, Phillipso retreated a step and a step and another, until he felt the edge of his desk against his glutei. The sandy-haired man, impassive, kept on walking—to Phillipso, through Phillipso, Phillipso's desk, Phillipso's chair, and Phillipso's equanimity, the lastnamed being the only thing he touched.

"I didn't want to do that," said the man some moments later, bending solicitously over Phillipso as he opened his eyes. He put out his hand as if to assist Phillipso to his feet. Phillipso bounced up by himself and cowered away, remembering only then that, on his own terms, the man could not have touched him. He crouched there, gulping and glaring, while the man shook his head regretfully. "I *am* sorry, Phillipso."

"Who are you, anyway?" gasped Phillipso.

For the first time the man seemed at a loss. He looked in puzzlement at each of Phillipso's eyes, and then scratched his head. "I hadn't thought of that," he said musingly. "Important, of course, of course. Labeling." Focussing his gaze more presently at Phillipso, he said, "We have a name for you people that translates roughly to '*Labelers*.' Don't be insulted. It's a categorization, liked '*biped*' or '*omnivorous*.' It means the mentality that verbalizes or it can't think."

"Who are you?"

"Oh, I do beg your pardon. Call me—uh, well, call me Hurensohn. I suggest that because I know you have to call me something, because it doesn't matter what you call me, and because it's the sort of thing you'll be calling me once you find out why I'm here."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then by all means let's discuss the matter until you do."

"D-discuss what?"

"I don't have to show you that ship out there again?"

"Please," said Phillipso ardently, "don't."

"Now look," said Hurensohn gently, "there is nothing to fear, only a great deal to explain. Please straighten up and take the knots out of your thorax. That's better. Now sit down calmly and we'll talk the whole thing over. *There, that's fine!*" As Phillipso sank shakily into his desk chair, Hurensohn lowered himself into the easy chair which flanked it. Phillipso was horrified to see the half-inch gap of air which, for five seconds or so, separated the man from the chair. Then Hurensohn glanced down, murmured an apology, and floated down to contact the cushion

somewhat more normally. "Careless, sometimes," he explained. "So many things to keep in mind at once. You get interested, you know, and next thing you're buzzing around without your light-warp or forgetting your hypno-field when you go in swimming, like that fool in Loch Ness."

"Are you really a—a—an extraulp?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Extra-terrestrial, extra-solar, extra-galactic—all that."

"You don't, I mean, I don't see any—"

"I know I don't look like one. I don't look like this"—he gestured down his gray waistcoat with the tips of all his fingers—"either. I could show you what I really do look like, but that's inadvisable. It's been tried." He shook his head sadly, and said again, "Inadvisable."

"Wh-what do you want?"

"Ah. Now we get down to it. How would you like to tell the world about me—about us?"

"Well, I already—"

"I mean, the *truth* about us."

"From the evidence I already have—" Phillipso began with some heat. It cooled swiftly. Hurensohn's face had taken on an expression of unshakable patience; Phillipso was suddenly aware that he could rant and rave and command and explain from now until Michaelmas, and this creature would simply wait him out. He knew, too (though he kept it well below the conscious area) that the more he talked the more he would leave himself open to contradiction—the worst kind of contradiction at that: quotes from Phillipso. So he dried right up and tried the other tack. "All right," he said humbly. "Tell me."

"Ah . . ." It was a long-drawn-out sound, denoting deep satisfaction. "I think I'll begin by informing you that you have, quite without knowing it, set certain forces in motion which can profoundly affect mankind for hundreds, even thousands of years."

"Hundreds," breathed Phillipso, his eye beginning to glow. "Even thousands."

"That is not a guess," said Hurensohn. "It's a computation.

And the effect you have on your cultural matrix is—well, let me draw an analogy from your own recent history. I'll quote something: *'Long had part of the idea; McCarthy had the other part. McCarthy got nowhere, failed with his third party, because he attacked and destroyed but didn't give. He appealed to hate, but not to greed, no what's-in-it-for-me, no porkchops.'* That's from the works of a reformed murderer who now writes reviews for the New York *Herald Tribune*."

"What has this to do with me?"

"You," said Hurensohn, "are the Joseph McCarthy of saucer-writers."

Phillipso's glow increased. "My," he sighed.

"And," said Hurensohn, "you may profit by his example. If that be—no, I've quoted enough. I see you are not getting my drift, anyway. I shall be more explicit. We came here many years ago to study your interesting little civilization. It shows great promise—so great that we have decided to help you."

"Who needs help?"

"Who needs help?" Hurensohn paused for a long time, as if he had sent away somewhere for words and was waiting for them to arrive. Finally, "I take it back. I won't be more explicit. If I explained myself in detail I would only sound corny. Any rephrasing of the Decalogue sounds corny to a human being. Every statement of every way in which you need help has been said and said. You are cursed with a sense of rejection, and your rejection begets anger and your anger begets crime and your crime begets guilt; and all your guilty reject the innocent and destroy their innocence. Riding this wheel you totter and spin, and the only basket in which you can drop your almighty insecurity is an almighty fear, and anything that makes the basket bigger is welcome to you. . . . Do you begin to see what I am talking about, and why I'm talking to you?"

"Fear is your business, your stock in trade. You've gotten fat on it. With humanity trembling on the edge of the known, you've found a new unknown to breed fear in. And this one's a honey; it's

infinite. Death from space . . . and every time knowledge lights a brighter light and drives the darkness back, you'll be there to show how much wider the circumference of darkness has become.

. . . Were you going to say something?"

"I am *not* getting fat," said Phillipso.

"Am I saying anything?" breathed the sandy-haired man. "Am I here at all?"

In all innocence Phillipso pointed out, "You said you weren't."

Hurensohn closed his eyes and said in tones of sweet infinite patience, "Listen to me, Phillipso, because I now fear I shall never speak to you again. Whether or not you like it—and you do, and we don't—you have become the central clearinghouse for the Unidentified Aerial Object. You have accomplished this by lies and by fear, but that's now beside the point—you accomplished it. Of all countries on earth, this is the only one we can effectively deal with; the other so-called Great Powers are constitutionally vindictive, or impotent, or hidebound, or all three. Of all the people in this country we could deal with—in government, or the great foundations, or the churches—we can find no one who could overcome the frenzy and foolishness of your following. You have forced us to deal with you."

"My," said Phillipso.

"Your people listen to you. More people than you know listen to your people—frequently without knowing it themselves. You have something for everyone on earth who feels small, and afraid, and guilty. You tell them they are right to be afraid, and that makes them proud. You tell them that the forces ranged against them are beyond their understanding, and they find comfort in each other's ignorance. You say the enemy is irresistible, and they huddle together in terror and are unanimous. And at the same time you expect yourself, implying that you and you alone can protect them."

"Well," said Phillipso, "if you have to deal with me . . . isn't it so?"

"It is not," said Hurensohn flatly. "'Protect' presupposes 'attack.' There is no attack. We came here to help."

"Liberate us," said Phillipso.

"Yes. No!" For the first time Hurensohn showed a sign of irritation. "Don't go leading me into your snide little rat-shrewd pitfalls, Phillipso! By liberate I meant make free; what you meant is what the Russians did to the Czechs."

"All right," said Phillipso guardedly. "You want to free us. Of what?"

"War. Disease. Poverty. Insecurity."

"Yes," said Phillipso. "It's corny."

"You don't believe it."

"I haven't thought about it one way or the other yet," said Phillipso candidly. "Maybe you can do all you say. What is it you want from me?"

Hurensohn held up his hands. Phillipso blinked as *The Man Who Saved the Earth* appeared in one of them and *We Need not Surrender* in the other. He then realized that the actual volumes must be in the ship. Some of his incipient anger faded; some of his insipid pleasure returned. Hurensohn said, "These. You'll have to retract."

"What do you mean retract?"

"Not all at once. You're going to write another book, aren't you? Of course; you'd have to." There was the slightest emphasis on "you'd" and Phillipso did not like it. However, he said nothing. Hurensohn went on: "You could make new discoveries. Revelations, if you like. Interpretations."

"I couldn't do that."

"You'd have all the help in the world. Or out of it."

"Well, but what for?"

"To draw the poison of those lies of yours. To give us a chance to show ourselves without getting shot on sight."

"Can't you protect yourselves against that?"

"Against the bullets, certainly. Not against what pulls the triggers."

"Suppose I do along with you."

"I told you! No poverty, no insecurity, no crime, no—"

"No Phillipso."

"Oh. You mean, what's in it for you? Can't you see? You'd make possible a new Eden, the flowering of your entire specie—a world where men laughed and worked and loved and achieved, where a child could grow up unafraid and where, for the first time in your history, human beings would understand one another when they spoke. You could do this—just you."

"I can see it," said Phillipso scathingly. "All the world on the village green and me with them, leading a morris dance. I couldn't live that way."

"You're suddenly very cocky, Mister Phillipso," said Hurensohn with a quiet and frightening courtesy.

Phillipso drew a deep breath. "I can afford to be," he said harshly. "I'll level with you, bogeyman." He laughed unpleasantly. "Good, huh. Bogey. That's what they call you when they—"

"—get us on a radar screen. I know, I know. Get to the point."

"Well. All right then. You asked for it." He got to his feet.

"You're a phony. You can maybe do tricks with mirrors, maybe even hide the mirrors, but that's it. If you could do a tenth of what you say, you wouldn't have to come begging. You'd just . . . do it. You'd just walk in and take over. By God, I would."

"You probably would," said Hurensohn, with something like astonishment. No, it was more like an incredulous distaste. He narrowed his eyes. For a brief moment Phillipso thought it was part of his facial expression, or the beginning of a new one, and then he realized it was something else, a concentration, a—

He shrieked. He found himself doing something proverbial, unprintable, and not quite impossible. He didn't want to do it—with all his mind and soul he did not want to, but he did it nonetheless.

"If and when I want you to," said Hurensohn calmly, "you'll do that in the window of Bullock's Wilshire at high noon."

"Please . . ."

"I'm not doing anything," said Hurensohn. He laughed explosively, put his hands in his jacket pockets, and—worst of all, he watched. "Go to it, boy."

"Please!" Phillipso whimpered.

Hurensohn made not the slightest detectible move, but Phillipso was suddenly free. He fell back into his chair, sobbing with rage, fear, and humiliation. When he could find a word at all, it came out between the fingers laced over his scarlet face, and was, "Inhuman. That was . . . inhuman."

"Uh-huh," agreed Hurensohn pleasantly. He waited until the walls of outrage expanded enough to include him, recoil from him, and return to the quivering Phillipso, who could then hear when he was spoken to. "What you've got to understand," said Hurensohn, "is that we don't do what we can do. We can, I suppose, smash a planet, explode it, drop it into the sun. You can, in that sense, eat worms. You don't, though, and wouldn't. In your idiom you *couldn't*. Well then, neither can we force humanity into anything without its reasoned consent. You can't understand that, can you? Listen: I'll tell you just how far it goes. We couldn't force even *one* human to do what we want done. You, for example."

"You-you just did, though."

Hurensohn shuddered—a very odd effect, rather like that on a screen when one thumps a slide-projector with the heel of one's hand. "A demonstration, that's all. Costly, I may add. I won't get over it as soon as you will. To make a point, you might say, I had to eat a bedbug." Again the flickering shudder. "But then, people have gone farther than that to put an idea over."

"I could refuse?" Phillipso said, timidly.

"Easily."

"What would you do to me?"

"Nothing."

"But you'd go ahead and—"

Hurensohn was shaking his head as soon as Phillipso began to speak. "We'd just go. You've done too much damage. If you won't repair it, there's no way for us to do it unless we use force, and we can't do that. It seems an awful waste, though. Four hundred years of observation. . . . I wish I could tell you the trouble we've gone to, trying to watch you, *learn* you, without interfering. Of

course, it's been easier since Kenneth Arnold and the noise he made about us."

"Easier?"

"Lord, yes. You people have a talent—really, a genius for making rational your unwillingness to believe your own eyes. We got along famously after the weather-balloon hypothesis was made public. It's so easy to imitate a weather balloon. Pokey, though. The greatest boon of all was that nonsense about temperature inversions. It's quite a trick to make a ship behave like automobile headlights on a distant mountain or the planet Venus, but temperature inversions?" He snapped his fingers. "Nothing to it. Nobody understands 'em so they explain everything. We thought we had a pretty complete tactical manual on concealment, but did you see the one the U. S. Air Force got out? Bless 'em! It even explains the mistakes we make. Well, most of them, anyway. That idiot in Loch Ness—"

"Wait, wait!" Phillipso wailed. "I'm trying to find out what I'm supposed to do, what will happen, and you sit there and go on so!"

"Yes, yes of course. You're quite right. I was just blowing words over my tongue to try to get the taste of you out of my mouth. Not that I really have a mouth, and that would make a tongue sort of frustrated, wouldn't it? Figure of speech, you know."

"Tell me again. This Paradise on earth—how long is it supposed to take? How would you go about it?"

"Through your next book, I suppose. We'd have to work out a way to counteract your other two without losing your audience. If you jump right into line and say how friendly and wise we aliens are, the way Adamski and Heard did, you'll only disappoint your followers. I know! I'll give you a weapon against these—uh—bogeymen of yours. A simple formula, a simple field generator. We'll lay it out so anyone can use it, and bait it with some of your previous nonsense—beg pardon, I might have meant some of your previous statements. Something guaranteed to defend Earth against the—uh—World Destroyers." He smiled. It was rather a pleasant sight. "It would, too."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if we claimed that the device had an effective range of fifty feet and it actually covered, say, two thousand square miles, and it was easy and cheap to build, and the plans were in every copy of your new book . . . let's see now, we'd have to pretend to violate a little security, too, so the people who aren't afraid would think they were stealing . . . hmmm."

"Device, device—*what* device?"

"Oh, a—" Hurensohn came up out of his reverie. "Labeling again, dammit. I'll have to think a minute. You have no name for such a thing."

"Well, what is it supposed to do?"

"Communicate. That is, it makes complete communications possible."

"We get along pretty well."

"Nonsense! You communicate with labels—words. Your words are like a jumble of packages under a Christmas tree. You know who sent each one and you can see its size and shape, and sometimes it's soft or it rattles or ticks. But that's all. You don't know *exactly* what it means and you won't until you open it. That's what this device will do—open your words to complete comprehension. If every human being, regardless of language, age or background, understood exactly what every other human being wanted, and knew at the same time that he himself was understood, it would change the face of the earth. Overnight."

Phillipso sat and thought that one out. "You couldn't bargain," he said at length. "You couldn't—uh—explain a mistake, even."

"You could explain it," said Hurensohn. "It's just that you couldn't excuse it."

"You mean every husband who—ah—flirted, every child who played hooky, every manufacturer who—"

"All that."

"Chaos," whispered Phillipso. "The very structure of—"

Hurensohn laughed pleasantly. "You know what you're saying, Phillipso. You're saying that the basic structure of your whole civilization is lies and partial truths, and that without them it would fall apart. And you're quite right." He chuckled again. "Your Tem-

ple of Space, just for example. What do you think would happen to it if all your sheep knew what their Shepherd was and what was in the shepherd's mind?"

"What are you trying to do—tempt me with all this?"

Most gravely Hurensohn answered him, and it shocked Phillipso to the marrow when he used his first name to do it. "I am, Joe, with all my heart I am. You're right about the chaos, but such a chaos should happen to mankind or any species like it. I will admit that it would strike civilization like a mighty wind, and that a great many structures would fall. But there would be no looters in the wreckage, Joe. No man would take advantage of the ones who fell."

"I know something about human beings," Phillipso said in a flat, hurt voice. "And I don't want 'em on the prowl when I'm down. Especially when they don't have anything. God."

Hurensohn shook his head sadly. "You don't know enough, then. You have never seen the core of a human being, a part which is not afraid, and which understands and is understood." Hurensohn searched his face with earnest eyes.

"Have you?"

"I have. I see it now. I see it in you all. But then, I see more than you do. You could see as much; you all could. Let me do it, Joe. Help me. Help me, *please*."

"And lose everything I've worked so hard to—"

"Lose? Think of the gain! Think of what you'd do for the whole world! Or—if it means any more to you—turn the coin over. Think of what you'll carry with you if you don't help us. Every war casualty, every death from preventable disease, every minute of pain in every cancer patient, every stumbling step of a multiple sclerosis victim, will be on your conscience from the moment you refuse me.

"Ah, think, Joe—*think!*"

Phillipso slowly raised his eyes from his clenched hands to Hurensohn's plain, intense face. Higher, then, to the dome and through it. He raised his hand and pointed. "Pardon me," he said shakily, "but your ship is showing."

"Pshaw," said Hurensohn surprisingly. "Dammit, Phillipso, you've gone and made me concentrate, and I've let go the warp-matrix and fused my omicron. Take a minute or two to fix. I'll be back." And he disappeared. He didn't go anywhere; he just abruptly wasn't.

Josephus Macardle Phillipso moved like a sleepwalker across the round room and stood against the plexiglas, staring up and out at the shining ship. It was balanced and beautiful, dusty-textured and untouchable like a moth's wing. It was lightly phosphorescent, flaring in the orange glow of the slashing searchlight, dimming rapidly almost to blackness just as the light cut at it again.

He looked past the ship to the stars, and in his mind's eye, past them to stars again, and stars, and whole systems of stars which in their remoteness looked like stars again, and stars again. He looked down then, to the ground under the Temple and down again to its steep slope, its one narrow terrace of a highway, and down and down again to the lamp-speckled black of the valley bottom. And if I fell from here to there, he thought, it would be like falling from crest to trough in the whorls of a baby's fingerprint.

And he thought, even with help from Heaven, I couldn't tell this truth and be believed. I couldn't suggest this work and be trusted. I am unfit, and I have unfit myself.

He thought bitterly, it's only the truth. The truth and I have a like polarity, and it springs away from me when I approach, by a law of nature. I prosper without the truth, and it has cost me nothing, nothing, nothing but the ability to tell the truth.

But I might try, he thought. What was it he said: *The core of a human being, a part which is not afraid, and which understands and is understood.* Who was he talking about? Anybody I know? Anyone I ever heard of? ("How are you?" you say, when you don't care how they are. "I'm sorry," you say, when you're not. "Goodby," you say, and it means God be with you, and how often is your goodbye a blessing? Hypocrisy and lies, thousands a day, so easily done we forget to feel guilty for them.)

I see it now, he said, though. Did he mean me? Could he see the core of me, and say that? . . . if he can see such a marrow, he can see a strand of spider-silk at sixty yards.

He said, Phillipso recalled, that if I wouldn't help, they'd do nothing. They'd go away that's all—go away, forever, and leave us at the mercy of—what was that sardonic phrase?—the World Destroyers.

"But I never lied!" he wailed, suddenly and frighteningly loud. "I never meant to. They'd ask, don't you see, and I'd only say yes or no, whatever they wanted to hear. The only other thing I ever did was to explain the yes, or the no; they didn't start out to be lies!" No one answered him. He felt very alone. He thought again, I could try . . . and then, wistfully, could I try?

The phone rang. He looked blindly at it until it rang again. Tiredly he crossed to it and picked it up. "Phillipso."

The phone said, "Okay, Swami, you win. How did you do it?"

"Who is that? Penfield?" Penfield, whose original Phillipso spread had started his rise from Sunday feature writer; Penfield, who, as district chief of a whole newspaper chain, had of course long since forsworn Phillipso . . .

"Yeah, Penfield," drawled the pugnacious, insulting voice. "Penfield who promised you faithfully that never again would these papers run a line about you and your phony space war."

"What do you want, Penfield?"

"So you win, that's all. Whether I like it or not, you're news again. We're getting calls from all over the county. There's a flight of F-84's on the way from the Base. There's a TV mobile unit coming up the mountain to get that flying saucer of yours on network, and four queries already from INS. I don't know how you're doing it, but you're news, so what's your lousy story?"

Phillipso glanced up over his shoulder at the ship. The orange searchlight set it to flaming once, once again, while the telephone urgently bleated his name. Around came the light, and—

And nothing. It was gone. The ship was gone. "Wait!" cried Phillipso hoarsely. But it was gone.

The phone gabbled at him. Slowly he turned back to it. "Wait,"

he said to it too. He put down the instrument and rubbed water out of his eyes. Then he picked up the phone again.

"I saw from here," said the tinny voice. "It's gone. What was it? What'd you do?"

"Ship," said Phillipso. "It was a spaceship."

"*'It was a spaceship,'*" Penfield repeated in the voice of a man writing on a pad. "So come on, Phillipso. What happened? Aliens came down and met you face to face, that it?"

"They—yes."

"'Face . . . to . . . face.' Got it. What'd they want?" A pause, then, angrily, "Phillipso, you there? Dammit, I got a story to get out here. What'd they want? They beg for mercy, want you to lay off?"

Phillipso wet his lips. "Well, yes. Yes, they did."

"What'd they look like?"

"I—they . . . there was only one."

Penfield growled something about pulling teeth. "All right, only one. One *what*? Monster, spider, octopus—come on, Phillipso!"

"It . . . well, it wasn't a man, exactly."

"A girl," said Penfield excitedly. "A girl of unearthly beauty. How's that? They've threatened you before. Now they came to beguile you with, and so on. How's that?"

"Well, I—"

"I'll quote you. '*Unearthly . . . mmm . . . and refused . . . mmm, temptation.*'"

"Penfield, I—"

"Listen, Swami, that's all you get. I haven't time to listen to any more of your crap. I'll give you this in exchange, though. Just a friendly warning, and besides, I want this story to hold up through tomorrow anyhow. ATIC and the FBI are going to be all over that Temple of yours like flies on a warm marshmallow. You better hide the pieces of that balloon or whatever else the trick was. When it reaches the point of sending out a flight of jets, they don't think publicity is funny."

"Penfield, I—" But the phone was dead. Phillipso hung up

and whirled to the empty room. "You see?" he wept. "You see what they make me do?"

He sat down heavily. The phone rang again. New York, the operator said. It was Jonathan, his publisher. "Joe! Your line's been busy. Great work, fella. Heard the bulletin on TV. How'd you do it? Never mind. Give me the main facts. I'll have a release out first thing in the morning. Hey, how soon can you get the new book done? Two weeks? Well, three—you can do it in three, fella. You have to do it in three. I'll cancel the new Heming—or the—never mind, I'll get press time for it. Now. Let's have it. I'll put you on the recorder."

Phillipso looked out at the stars. From the telephone, he heard the first sharp high *beep* of the recording machine. He bent close to it, breathed deeply, and said, "Tonight I was visited by aliens. This was no accidental contact like my first one; they planned this one. They came to stop me—not with violence, not by persuasion, but with—uh—the ultimate weapon. A girl of unearthly beauty appeared amidst the coils and busbars of my long-range radar. I—"

From behind Phillipso came a sound, soft, moist, explosive—the exact reproduction of someone too angry, too disgusted to speak, but driven irresistibly to spit.

Phillipso dropped the telephone and whirled. He thought he saw the figure of a sandy-haired man, but it vanished. He caught the barest flicker of something in the sky where the ship had been, but not enough really to identify; then it was gone too.

"I was on the phone," he whimpered. "I had too much on my mind, I thought you'd gone, I didn't know you'd just fixed your warp-what-ever-you-call-it, I didn't mean, I was going to, I—"

At last he realized he was alone. He had never been so alone. Absently he picked up the telephone and put it to his ear. Jonathan was saying excitedly, ". . . and the title. *The Ultimate Weapon*. Cheesecake pic of the girl coming out of the radar, nekkid. The one thing you haven't used yet. We'll *bomb* 'em, boy. Yeah, and you resisting, too. Do wonders for your Temple. But get busy on that book, hear? Get it to me in fifteen days and you can open your own branch of the U.S. mint."

Slowly, without speaking or waiting to see if the publisher was finished, Phillipso hung up. Once, just once, he looked out at the stars, and for a terrible instant each star was a life, a crippled limb, a faulty heart, a day of agony; and there were millions on countless millions of stars, and some of the stars were galaxies of stars; by their millions, by their flaming megatons, they were falling on him now and would fall on him forever.

He sighed and turned away, and switched on the light over his typewriter. He rolled in a sandwich of bond, carbon, second-sheet, centered the carriage, and wrote

THE ULTIMATE WEAPON

by

Josephus Macardle Phillipso.

Facile, swift, deft, and dedicated, he began to write.

The only reasonably economical way of accurately describing a John Collier story is to report: "This is a John Collier story."

Meeting of Relations

by John Collier

Fold after fold of hills, already tawny with summer, encircled the valley where the Oxus flowed between wide meadows of knee-high grass and nodding flowers. The afternoon was as golden as an afternoon can be. It had that timeless, still and classic quality which insists the world has been thus, and will be thus, forever.

The herdsmen, whose cattle grazed the lower slopes were gathered under the dark levels of a cedar tree, from whose reddish trunk a little bronze oozed into the black-green shade. The deep silence of cedar shade was invaded by no sound except for the sweet and brittle note of the cicada, which seemed to enter the silence without destroying it.

The herdsmen were not talking. They were looking across the valley at the long track that led into the hills to the west. Along this track the figure of a single man was advancing, and had already grown from the size of a fly to the size of a heron, and now he was approaching the ford. There seemed nothing to fear in a man who came alone and on foot. Nevertheless, they continued to watch him.

Soon he had waded through the shallows, and had started upon the uphill track that led past the tree under which they were sitting. As he approached they saw he was not dressed as they were, but wore a headdress of white cloth, which was banded low on his forehead, and flowed down his back almost to his heels. It was impossible to guess at his age.

He saw the herdsmen and came straight toward their tree. "Brothers," he said, "I have come a long way. Allow me to rest among you."

This, in the world of that day, was an implied request for re-

freshment, and soon he was provided with a bowl of milk, and a piece of the coarse bread which was the staple food of the herdsmen.

"You have come a long way?" asked the senior among them.

"I have traveled more days," said he, "than there are cattle in your herds. And you have many cattle."

"Your speech is strange in our ears," said the other. "Have you come from beyond the place where the sun sinks, where there is nothing but darkness?"

"That," said one of the boys, frightened, "that is the land of the dead."

"No, brother," said the stranger. "That is farther than you think. Out there there are still countries where the sun shines. It seems a man might journey forever."

"Is yours the land where the gods walk among men?" asked the other boy, "and have heads like those of hawks and of dogs?"

"No, though I have heard of that country," said the man. "But I have never seen it."

"Have you heard of the closed garden," asked another, "where the serpent guards the fruit of gold?"

"I have heard of it, brother," said the stranger.

"You are weary in the spirit," said the senior herdsmen, after a silence that had come unbidden upon them. "What do you seek that you travel so far and take no rest?"

"I go east, brother," said the stranger. "I have heard of a far land where the strong men do no labor, but bear arms for the king."

"Are there so many wolves?" asked one of the boys. "Are there other beasts that prey on the herds?"

"No," said the stranger, "but there are other pastures to be won from those who hold them. There are lands with riches such as you have never dreamed of, all to be won by those who bear arms for the king."

"No one bears arms for our king," said one of the men. "He offers our sacrifice. He discovers when the herds shall move from

the hillsides to the plain, but for the rest he is one of ourselves. Why should we bear arms for him?"

"To live well," said the stranger. "What is better than when strong men, like a band of brothers, set out to make themselves great upon the earth, and win wide spaces for their fields and their flocks and their herds?"

"To do that," said the oldest man, "they must leave untended the cattle they have already."

"What of it, brother," said the stranger, "what of it, so long as they have weapons in their hands? There are always more lands to be won."

"It is true," said one boy to the other.

"But if a people is small?" said one of the men. "There is, perhaps here, a small people, and yonder a people that is great. It seems it must go ill with the small peoples."

"Then they must yield to the greater," said the stranger, "and lean upon them, and join with them, and do their will."

"The will of strangers!" said the senior.

"Why not, brother?" said the stranger. "It is no dishonor for a small people to lean upon a stronger brother."

"Brother is a word you use often," said the old man. "You are not of our people, yet you call us by that name."

"Why not?" said the stranger. "All men are brothers."

"Yet," said the old man, "since we are not accustomed to speak that way, tell us the name you bear in the country of your birth."

"Cain," said the stranger.

Fantasy and Science Fiction has published a considerable number of stories by members of the fair sex, and many of those stories might well have been written by men. The following tale, concerning the nature of love and faith, could have been written only by a woman, and quite possibly only by the fair Mildred Clingerman.

First Lesson

by Mildred Clingerman

The house was very ugly—one of those narrow three-story Queen Anne houses with scalloped siding and a turret. Back in the nineties some other woman, perhaps, had occupied the turret bedroom and considered it romantic. Sometimes in the late afternoons I'd lean my arms on the windowsill and stare down through the green leaves of the tulip tree, watching for Hugh to turn into this quiet street, and I'd remember that tower rooms were the traditional vantage points for wives of soldiering husbands. There were half a dozen other wives waiting in that house for their men, but I knew that none of them waited with my peculiar fear.

As a matter of fact, Hugh and I felt ourselves very fortunate to be in that house. Hugh was neither an officer nor an officer candidate, and the landladies in that town upheld army tradition by almost never mixing enlisted men with the officer caste. But our landlady had a streak of romance and rebellion. She also had a soft spot for the enlisted paratroopers, who seemed to represent for her the essence of the crazy wildness Southern women find so attractive in men. Moreover, I was able to fall into Southern speech at will. I had only to remember the tones of my grandmother's voice, and my tongue obligingly produced the sounds that made my landlady happy; my voice grew higher and draggingly sweet, and the rhythm of the words changed subtly. One used almost any weapon to acquire a room in those days, in that town. Mrs. Allen, our landlady, had grown very fond of me almost immediately.

The officers' wives were not in the least fond of me. We smiled

coolly at each other when we passed on the stairway. They were punctilious about allowing me my turn in the bathroom, but the only conversation I'd ever had with any of them was once when the tall dark one ran out of cigarettes and borrowed a pack from me. She was in a great hurry to get back to her room and only paused long enough to tell me that the turret room was charming, really charming. Her enthusiasm alarmed me. I was afraid she wanted it for friends and might influence Mrs. Allen to make us move. But then I recalled Tall Dark's New Jersey accent and knew how unlikely it was that Mrs. Allen would ever be swayed by crisp consonants.

I ought to have been very lonely, I suppose. I was homesick for mountains and desert and distance, and I was often sickened by that hate and fear, so palpable in the South it oppressed one's breathing at times, but I wasn't lonely. Unless there was a night jump scheduled, Hugh came swinging down the street every afternoon, having been deposited at the corner by the bus labelled JORDON, which one must always remember to pronounce *Jur-dan*. Later the two of us would sally forth for the evening meal, since the turret room had no cooking facilities. So, except for the recurring dream that tortured me most nights, the evenings were good. I never told Hugh about the dream, and when I cried out in my sleep, he woke me with sleepy little kisses, murmuring all our familiar love words till I slept again. I roused briefly when his alarm clock rang at four A.M. and lay blinking at the brightness of the overhead light while Hugh dressed, listening to the heavy sighing with which Hugh greeted another day of soldiering. Watching his meticulous lacing of the paratrooper boots had such a hypnotic effect on me that generally I fell asleep again and never even heard his departure.

Mrs. Allen gave me coffee in the late mornings. She kept her coffeepot full all day, and I was free to help myself. Several times a day she stood at the foot of the stairway and summoned me with her fluty, penetrating voice to come have a "dope" with her. Bottled cola drinks in the South were so strong they made me feel as if my scalp were floating, and I rarely managed to down more

than one a day, while Mrs. Allen easily disposed of six or eight.

When Mrs. Allen wasn't drinking coffee or cola, which she drank always standing up, staring exhaustedly at the kitchen sink, she was following the colored maid around, exhorting and pleading in a sweetly despairing voice audible all over the house. Iris was a sullen-faced young woman who never swept the corners of rooms, but plied her broom in aimless circles while she gazed inscrutably at the cobwebs hanging from the high ceilings. One often met Iris carrying a mop bucket full of cold, greasy black water and dragging a string mop that resembled a tumbled heap of dark worms, some of which detached themselves to lie coiled in waiting all along the hall. Sometimes there was an ominous silence between the two women that kept me confined to my room, despite my longing for coffee. There were days, I knew, when the widowed Mrs. Allen woke up "suffering" and dosed herself liberally with bourbon. The kitchen wasn't a pleasant spot on such mornings. But after a few hours I'd hear Iris and Mrs. Allen laughing together—shrieking, rather—their laughter so much alike I couldn't distinguish one voice from the other. I'd go down then and have my coffee before I dressed to leave the house for a late luncheon.

I was one of an army of wives that invaded the streets at that hour. Most of them walked in pairs like schoolgirls, eating together, shopping together, sharing little private jokes, and occasionally quarreling with the bitter intensity of bored women. I came to recognize many of these couples, and we all smiled and nodded, but I had no desire to join them or to link myself with any of the other unattached women who made tentative efforts to form an alliance. My reluctance was, I suppose, a kind of snobbery, but it was also an effort to maintain some semblance of my normal, civilian life which had never depended on just that type of feminine companionship.

I explored the town on foot and by bus. I spent hours in the library, and once I rented a light airplane and flew myself high over the town for an hour and a half of blissful solitude, till the mist from the river cut down on the visibility. It looked a very

clean, orderly world from up there, but I knew better. The war was going badly for us at that time, and any day now Hugh's group would be shipped out. In the meantime they were practicing night jumping with full equipment, and with this step-up in the training program my nightmare dream became more insistent, more detailed.

I became less and less able each morning to shake off the horror of the dream. Mrs. Allen began to chide me for looking so poorly. Even Iris, who had ignored me for the most part, began to cluck a soft, wordless counterpoint to Mrs. Allen's mournful inventory of all that was wrong with my appearance. I was much too pale, they assured me; my eyes looked like two burnt holes in a blanket, and I'd better get myself to a doctor before my bones started poking out of my skin. Iris followed me back to my room one day carrying the mop bucket and the squirming mop, with the avowed intention of doing up my room for me. At her insistence I retreated to the bed while she smeared the middle of the worn linoleum with the liquid that resembled swampwater. Her eyes flashed with something like friendliness when I offered her a cigarette and asked her to sit down a minute and talk to me. She dropped into the straight chair, as far away from me as she could get in that small room. For a while we simply smoked, avoiding each other's eyes, both of us overcome by acute embarrassment.

Finally Iris said, "You 'bout worried sick?"

I shook my head. "I keep having the same dream," I said. "It's so real—I can't forget it in the daytime. It haunts me. I know it's silly to let it bother me so much . . ." My voice trailed off, and I tried to find something in the room to look at, because Iris' eyes were unreadable.

"Is it a real bad dream?"

"Horrible," I said. We stared earnestly at each other then for a long moment, and something stirred between the black woman and me—a tenuous thread of communication that seemed to dispel all the barriers we'd each put up. I forgot that I was not superstitious, and I realized I was asking for help. I can't be sure, but I think Iris forgot for an instant that I was white and too

know-it-all to be deserving of help. In any case her response came almost automatically, as if she were unable to stop herself.

"Tell Iris. . ."

I drew a deep breath and told her. I told her about the inky night sky and the droning airplane and the tense men lined up in the aisle of the plane, waiting for the signal light that would tell them they were over their drop area. I told her about Hugh, standing in the open door, just behind the lieutenant who was to lead off the jump. I saw the first man whisked out the door with Hugh right behind him. I saw their grimacing faces when the opening shock hit them—somewhat comparable, I told Iris, to hitting a padded brick wall at 85 miles an hour. But this was all right, this was normal. It always happened when they hit the end of the static line and the chutes opened. I told her about the expanse of white silk that billowed over Hugh's head for a moment, before it partially collapsed; of how he shook the lines, his head strained back, his voice cursing in the sudden silence; of how, finally, the chute blossomed out again, but with two panels blown. Beside him and above him men called to each other—some laughing with the relief from tension. One man, far off in the windy darkness, was talking coaxingly to his parachute, "Come on, baby, baby . . . sweet baby."

Suddenly a voice warned, strident and angry, "Slip to the right! Hot damn, they've dropped us over the trees. . . ." Hugh reacted instantly, tugging at his lines. He began to oscillate. He seemed to be dropping faster, swinging in a great arc. Never mind. Get set for the landing fall, knees slightly bent and together, shoulders hunched for the rolling tumble, head down, chin in. Was that the ground? Don't tense. . . . He never saw the jagged, heavy fence post. His back was turned to it, and he could not know that it was slanted toward him waiting like a giant fork. Only the watcher in the dream saw the fork spear the man through the back and emerge, glistening and sticky, through his torn chest. There wasn't any outcry from the man at all. It was the dreamer who cried out in horror and grief. The man hung there, impaled, while the uncollapsed chute danced angrily where it touched the meadow,

tugging unmercifully at the dead man and the fence post. . . .

Iris shuddered and opened her eyes. I found I'd been staring at one of the brass knobs at the foot of the bed, but I hadn't known I was looking at it. My eyes had been turned inward to the dreadful vision that was becoming more real than anything else in my life. It was queer how the dream gathered details to itself as time went by. At first I'd seen only the body on the fence post. I hadn't known it was Hugh. Little by little the dream had developed backward from that moment, till now it was as if I were accompanying Hugh in the airplane, jumping beside him, watching and listening, hovering near him in helplessness.

There was something else about the dream that frightened me. Hugh rarely spoke of his job to me. Was it possible for me to have gathered so much knowledge about his jumps from the little he'd said? Perhaps. After all, I'd done a little night-flying; I'd even worn a parachute when I practiced spins, but I'd never been inside a plane of the type the troopers rode in. I'd never jumped out of an airplane in my life and hoped I never should. Still . . . it was just barely possible that I might imagine how it was. I think it was this daytime reasoning that had kept me free, for a long while, of the suffocating panic I now experienced.

Iris brought me a cigarette and lighted it with shaky hands.

"What . . . what do you think, Iris?" I asked.

"It sound bad to me," Iris said. "You tried prayin'?"

I shook my head. "I . . . the truth is, Iris, I don't know how."

Iris looked at me in surprise. "Ain't you got faith?"

"I guess not. . . ." I turned away from Iris' eyes. They had the scatty look that said I was a strange breed of cat.

"Don't you believe in nothin'?" I could tell by her voice that Iris was not so much censuring me as indulging her curiosity.

"A few things . . . maybe. Bad things, mostly, I guess. Obviously I'm beginning to believe in this rotten dream."

"Yeah," Iris said, and it was comment enough.

"You got any ideas?" Iris asked, after a long silence.

"None," I said. "I can't very well go to Hugh's commanding

officer and ask him please not to make Hugh jump any more, because I've had a bad dream."

"No," Iris acknowledged. "You reckon your man could play sick?"

"He wouldn't do it. Anyway, I've never told him—I won't tell him—about the dream."

"You did right there," Iris said. "It would only fret him. . . . When he gonna jump again?"

"I don't know. In a few days, I guess. He'll tell me beforehand."

"Well, now, listen," Iris said. "They is something you can do." She looked at me measuringly. "You got twenty dollars? That's what it costs—twenty dollars. And you gotta do just like I say. You just give me the money, heah? I'll fix it all up so's you don't need to worry. Now, listen. . . ."

I listened with a kind of numbed distaste to the instructions Iris gave me. When she finished I protested that I could never, never believe in such foolishness—or magic, whatever she wanted to call it.

"You don't have to believe," Iris said. "They's others will do the believin'. You just pays the money. And anybody could do the rest of it—them two little bitty things I told you. Lordy! Ain't you willin' to spend any amount to save your man?"

I got up and found my purse and gave Iris a twenty-dollar bill. I didn't believe for a minute that she could help me, any more than she'd helped me already, simply by listening to me.

"I gotta go," Iris said. "Remember, tomorrow, you listen for the strawberry man." She stood in the open doorway with the mop and pail. Just before she closed the door, she spoke again, her voice sly and amused. "Don't be surprised none if you start believin' in it yourself. Most folks *does* believe in the power of a twenty-dollar bill."

The next morning I got up and dressed much earlier than usual. When I went down to the kitchen, it was empty, but I heard Iris and Mrs. Allen in the front part of the house. I didn't want to see Iris that day, so I drank my coffee hurriedly and sped

back to my room to wait for the Negro peddlers whose distinctive calls would soon sound in the quiet street.

The first one to appear pushed a barrow filled with fresh black-eyes peas. "BACK! Ah, peace . . ." the man called, with a poignant, sorrowful cry. He got a good response from the housewives or their maids. I leaned on my windowsill to watch. After ten minutes or so of silence, the street was filled with the cry of the strawberry man. "Star bees? *RIPE* star bees . . ." It was a charming, plaintive question and answer. Often when I'd been lying half-awake listening to it, I'd tried to imagine just what a star bee looked like, tempted to empty my purse for a swarm of them. This morning, though, the call meant something else to me, something dark and alien and faintly disgusting. Whatever it was I was buying from the man, I was certain it wasn't anything so nice as star bees.

He had rested his barrow directly beneath my window, and stood there as if waiting for my appearance. I called down to him and gestured stiffly when he looked up at me. On my way down to him I was glad not to meet anyone on the stairs. The house seemed suddenly deserted.

The strawberry man, I saw, was very old. He pulled a long, wrinkled earlobe by way of greeting me. From an inside pocket of his torn old coat he produced a small gray envelope and handed it to me.

"Iris sent me," I said unnecessarily, since I already held the envelope.

He nodded and seemed to look far beyond me. "You f'm Arizona?"

"Yes," I said. "Have you been there?"

"Cowboys," the old man murmured. "And Indians . . ." He nodded positively at me as if to assure me that the world held endless riches. Then the old, yellowed eyes filled with tears and his pendulous lower lip trembled. "Some say . . ." He looked a thousand questions at me, as if doubt tormented him.

"Oh, it's *true*," I answered, and his face lighted with delight. I turned away then, because I didn't want the strawberry man

to see in my eyes that the cowboys and Indians I knew were not in the least like the godlike creatures he dreamed of, that the mythical men he revered were exactly as numerous as star bees, and truth more elusive than either.

Back in my room I opened the small envelope and examined its contents—three pieces of white rice paper, scrawled all over with red ink. I recognized the paper as leaves from a book of cigarette papers. I couldn't make anything of the scrawled writing. If there were words written on the papers, they were in no language I had ever seen. Some of the words seemed to flow into minute, scratched pictures, one of which may have been a rooster, another a goat. But, according to Iris' reiterated instructions, it wasn't a part of my task to decipher the markings. My task was much simpler; I had only to chew up the papers and swallow them.

"You've gone this far," I told myself. "Why balk now?" The papers went down more easily than I had expected. The next part was even simpler. I fished two pennies out of my change purse and slipped them into the envelope.

I left Mrs. Allen's house then and took a bus to town. From the bus terminal I walked eight blocks to the river. From the pedestrian's walk on the bridge I threw the envelope with its pennies into the muddy water. Afterwards I ate a good lunch and went to a movie, and I felt strangely quiet and peaceful.

I had scarcely returned to my turret room when Mrs. Allen called me to the telephone in the downstairs hallway.

"It's Hugh," Mrs. Allen told me. "I expect he's going to be delayed this evening."

"Sorry, darling," Hugh said. "I'll be late tonight. They've scheduled another jump. You'd better go have your dinner without me. I'm not sure just what time I'll get back. They've got a whole mob of us stacked up here at Malfunction Junction."

Malfunction Junction was the paratroopers' wry name for the airport.

It was a long evening. I wasn't hungry enough to go out to eat. I drank coffee with Mrs. Allen and ate a candy bar I found in our room. I tried to read, but I was unable to bring to my reading

the same quality of attention I usually devoted to it on the nights Hugh jumped. But that fact was, in a way, a relief. I hated ever to use reading as one uses a drug. I sat in my room and tried to decide if I was as fearful as I had been over past jumps. Yes, but with a difference. What was it? For one thing, I was able to sit still without the anchor of a book. For another, I had made some kind of contact with the future, with tomorrow, by my imitation of an act of faith. Unable to believe for myself, I was yet able to believe that somebody, somewhere (more primitive, more gullible) was believing in my stead. As I say, it was a very long evening, and I had plenty of time for thinking—thinking with a difference.

At ten o'clock when the tall, dark girl from New Jersey knocked on my door, I was able to answer without any show of fear. How many times I'd waited for Hugh, terrified that somebody would come knocking to tell me he was dead.

Seeing my light, she said, she'd come to borrow cigarettes again. She was appealingly shamefaced about it, remembering that she'd never paid back the first package. It took me a few moments to realize that she hadn't really come for that reason. After I'd shared my cigarettes with her and invited her to sit down, she admitted she'd met Mrs. Allen hovering in the hallway, and that Mrs. Allen had asked her to step in and keep me company for a little while.

"My husband's away this evening, too," the girl said. "Isn't this a dull hole to be stationed in?"

We talked for an hour and then parted with shy friendliness.

At midnight I was still sitting in the lumpy old wing chair, numbly waiting for the sound of Hugh's boots on the stairway. At two A.M. when he opened the door, I knew at once that something disastrous had happened. Hugh was very pale. I remember thinking that he looked exactly as if somebody had dusted his face with flour. He came to me at once and put his head against mine. His hands gripped my shoulders so hard I wanted to protest, but I didn't. I began to cry very quietly, and for long minutes neither of us said a word.

Finally Hugh said, "Three of them drifted into the river. All drowned. Lots of them landed in the trees, but none seriously injured. Two malfunctions . . . one man with a streamer hit the ground, still flipping at his lines. We yelled at him to pull the chest pack. It was as if he couldn't hear us. . . . Was it windy here? Very windy over there across the river. . . . I came down by a fence. You know those barbed wire fences they have out in the country here? Like military entanglements, almost. There was a jagged post . . . Somebody yelled at me. My God, baby, it was close. . . . What startled me—everybody, you know, was yelling tonight—it sounded like you. Whoever it was, some real young kid, I guess, he called me by my first name. He saved my life. It was a loused-up jump from the word go. The pilot must have seen what he thought was the ground signal—probably some farmer's lantern—and he thought he was over our drop area. It took hours to find everybody. Darling, darling, don't cry. . . ."

Slowly Hugh relaxed enough to begin undressing for bed. He talked softly, monotonously, though, all the time he was unlacing his boots. "Look, here and here, at the riser burns on my neck. . . . And my helmet fell down over my face—separated from the helmet liner. Took me forever, it seemed, to shove it back so I could see anything. The opening shock was bad tonight. I blew two panels. Shook one old boy right out of his boots. . . ."

Hugh pulled off one of his own boots, and a penny rolled out. He stared at it in disbelief, then slowly pulled off the other boot and shook it. Another penny rolled across the floor.

"Now what stupid idiot did that?" Hugh was shaking with anger. "Anybody knows it's dangerous as hell to do silly, superstitious things like that—those damn pennies could have buried themselves in my feet if they'd got turned sideways."

That was the last jump Hugh made in the States. A week later he was shipped out for Europe. I should have been very happy if I'd known when I said goodbye to him that I'd see him again in two years, that he would be the same Hugh, a little quieter and older, but otherwise untouched.

I gave up the turret room to friends of the tall, dark girl from New Jersey. I told Mrs. Allen and Iris goodbye and went home to the desert to work and wait. Mrs. Allen sent me a Christmas card that year and enclosed a note from Iris. It read:

They is a kindygarten for faith, too. You just swallows the good words and casts your bread on the waters. That was all I meant to teach you. All that fancy stuff was just plumb foolishness, like you said. The strawberry man is my daddy. It was me drawed the pictures with red ink. It was me and my daddy that prayed. Excuse me, but your letter don't make any sense to me. I never put no pennies in your mister's boots. How could I? I thought they went in the river? Please answer, because them pennies are fretting me. Best wishes from Iris.

The tree of Mr. Young's title is very nearly as high as the Empire State Building—which in one sense renders this a tall tale; in another, human, sense, it is nothing of the sort.

To Fell a Tree

by Robert F. Young

The First Day

Just before the treeman's lift began to rise, Strong swung it around so that his back would be toward the trunk. The less he saw of the tree during the initial phase of his ascent, the better. But the lift was little more than a triangular steel frame suspended vertically from a thread-thin winch cable, and before it had risen a hundred feet it swung back to its original position. Whether he liked it or not, the tree was going to be with him right from the start.

The trunk was about fifteen feet away. What it made Strong think of most was a cliff, a convex, living cliff, with bark-prominences eight to ten feet long and fissures three to four feet deep—an arboreal precipice rising into a green and majestic cloud of foliage.

He hadn't intended to look up, but his eyes had followed the sweep of the trunk of their own volition. Abruptly he lowered them. To reassure himself, he looked down into the shrinking village square at the familiar figures of his three companions.

Suhre and Blueskies were standing on one of the ancient burial mounds, smoking morning cigarettes. Strong was too high to see the expressions on their faces, but he knew that Suhre's stolid features were probably set in stubborn resentment and that Blueskies was probably wearing his "buffalo-look." Wright was about a hundred feet out from the base of the tree, operating the winch. His face would be essentially the same as it always was a little pinched from worry, perhaps, but still embodying that

strange mixture of gentleness and determination, still unmistakably a leader's face.

Strong raised his eyes to the houses surrounding the square. They were even more enchanting seen from above than from below. Omicron Ceti's red-gold radiance lay colorfully on chameleon roof-tops, danced brightly on gingerbread façades. The nearer houses were empty now, of course—the village, within a three-hundred-yard radius of the tree, had been vacated and roped off—but looking at them, Strong got the fanciful impression that pixies had moved in during the night and were taking over the household chores while the villagers were away.

The thought amused him while it lasted, but it did not last long. The convoy of huge timber-carriers that moved into the square and parked in a long waiting line sent it scurrying.

Once again he confronted the tree. He was higher now, and the trunk should have become smaller. It had not—at least not perceptibly. It still resembled a convex cliff, and he felt more like a mountain climber than he did a treeman. Looking up, he saw the first limb. All he could think of was a horizontal sequoia growing on the vertical slope of a dendritic Everest.

Wright's crisp voice sounded over the tree-to-ground radio hookup, the receiver and minuscule batteries of which were attached to Strong's left ear lobe: "Seen any dryads yet?"

Strong tongued on the tiny transmitter attached to his lower lip. "Not yet."

"If you do, let me know."

"Like hell! That long blade of grass I drew gave me exclusive treerights, remember? Whatever I find up here is mine!"

Wright laughed. "Just trying to help out."

"I don't need any help, thanks. What's my height?"

There was a pause. Strong watched the cigarette-size figure of Wright bend over the winch-control panel. Presently: "One hundred and sixty-seven feet. Another hundred and twenty more and you'll be even with the first limb. . . . How do you feel?"

"Not bad."

"Good. Let me know if anything goes wrong. The least little thing."

"Will do." Strong tongued off.

It was growing darker. No, not darker. Greener. The little sunlight that filtered down through the countless strata of foliage in a pale, chlorophyllic glow deepened in hue in ratio to his ascent. Tree-fright touched him, but he dispelled it by applying an antidote he'd learned in treeschool. The antidote was simple: *concentrate on something, anything at all*. He took inventory of the equipment attached to the base-bar of the lift: tree-pegs, treerations, blankets; tree-tent, heating unit, peg-hammer; cable-caster, cutter, first-aid pack; climbing belt, saddle-rope, limblime (only the ringed end of the limblime was attached to the bar—the line itself trailed down to a dwindling coil at the tree's base); Timken-unit, tree-tongs, canteen . . .

At length the lift drew him into the lower foliage. He had expected the leaves to be huge, but they were small and delicate, reminiscent of the leaves of the lovely sugar maple that once had flourished on Earth. Presently he came opposite the first limb, and a flock of scarlet hahaha birds derided his arrival with a chorus of eldritch laughter. They circled around him several times, their little half-moons of eyes regarding him with seeming cynicism, then they spiraled out of sight into the upper branches.

The limb was like a ridge that had torn itself free from a mountain range to hover high above the village. Its branches were trees in their own right, each capable, were it to fall, of demolishing at least one of the houses the colonists loved so dearly.

Why, Strong wondered for the dozenth time, had the original inhabitants of Omicron Ceti 18's major continent built their villages around the bases of such arboreal monsters? The Advance Team had stated in its report that the natives, despite their ability to build beautiful houses, had really been very primitive. But even so, they should have realized the potential threat such massive trees could pose during an electrical storm; and most of all they should have realized that excessive shade encouraged dampness and that dampness was the forerunner of decay.

Clearly they had not. For, of all the villages they had built, the present one was the only one that had not rotted into noisome ruin, just as the present tree was the only one that had not contracted the hypothetical blight that had caused the others to wither away and die.

It was the Advance Team's contention that the natives had built their villages close to the trees because the trees were religious symbols. But, while the fact that they had migrated en masse to the "death-caves" in the northern barrens when the trees began to die certainly strengthened the contention, Strong still found it difficult to accept. The architecture of the houses suggested a practical as well as an artistic race of people, and a practical race of people would hardly commit self-genocide just because their religious symbols turned out to be susceptible to disease. Moreover, Strong had removed trees on a good many newly-opened planets, and he had seen the Advance Team proved wrong on quite a number of occasions.

The foliage was below him now, as well as above and around him. He was in a world apart, a hazy, greenish-gold world stippled with tree-flowers (the month was the Omicron Ceti 18 equivalent of June and the tree was in blossom), inhabited only by himself and the hahaha birds, and the insects that constituted their diet. He could see an occasional jigsaw-patch of the square through the intervening leaves, but that was all. Wright was out of sight; so were Suhre and Blueskies.

About fifteen feet below the limb over which he had made his original cable-cast, he told Wright to halt the winch. Then he detached the cable-caster from the base-bar, fitted the butt to his shoulder and started the lift swinging back and forth. He selected the highest limb he could see, one about eighty feet up, and at the extremity of one of his swings on the winch side of the tree, he aimed and squeezed the trigger.

It was like a spider spitting a filament of web. The gossamer cable drifted up and over the chosen limb and its weighted end plummeted down through leaf and flower to dangle inches from

his outstretched fingers. He caught it on the next swingback and, still swinging, pressed it against the apex of the lift-triangle till its microscopic fibers rooted themselves in the steel; then he snipped the "new" cable free from the caster with his pocket-snips and returned the caster to the base-bar. Finally he increased the arc of his swing till he could grasp the original cable, which slanted down through the foliage to the winch. He held on to it long enough to squeeze together the two cables—the "old" and the "new"—till they automatically interspliced, and to sever the by-passed section.

The slack in the "new" cable caused the lift to drop several feet. He waited till the swing diminished sufficiently, then told Wright to start the winch again. The infinitesimal Timkens coating the thread-thin cable began rolling over the "new" limb, and the lift resumed its upward journey. Strong leaned back in his safety belt and lit a cigarette.

That was when he saw the dryad.

Or thought he did.

The trouble was, the dryad talk had been a big joke. The kind of a joke that springs up among men whose relationships with real women are confined to the brief intervals between assignments.

You didn't believe it, you told yourself; you knew damned well that no matter what tree you climbed on whatever planet, no lovely lady elf was going to come skipping down some leaf-trellised path and throw herself into your yearning arms. And yet all the while you were telling yourself that such a thing was never going to happen, you kept wondering in the dark outlands of your mind where common sense had never dared set foot, whether some day it *might* happen.

All during the voyage in from Earth and all during the ride from the spaceport to the village, they had tossed the joke back and forth. There was—if you took credence in Suhre's and Blueskies' and Wright's talk . . . and in his own talk too—at least one dryad living in the last giant tree on Omicron Ceti 18, and what a time they were going to have catching her!

All right, Strong thought. You saw her. Now let's see you catch her.

It had been the merest glimpse—no more than a suggestion of curves and color and fairy-face—and as the image faded from his retina, his conviction faded too. By the time the lift pulled him up into the bower where he'd thought she'd been, he was positive she would not be there. She was not.

He noticed that his hands were trembling. With an effort he steadied them. It was ridiculous to become upset over a prankish play of sunlight on leaf and limb, he told himself.

Then, at 475 feet, he thought he saw her again.

He had just checked his elevation with Wright when he happened to glance toward the trunk. She appeared to be leaning against the bark, her long leg braced on the limb he had just come abreast of. Tenuous of figure, pixyish of features, golden of hair. She couldn't have been over twenty feet away.

"Hold it," he told Wright in a low voice. When the lift stopped rising he unfastened his safety belt and stepped out upon the limb. The dryad did not move.

He walked toward her slowly. Still she did not move. He rubbed his eyes to clear them, half-hoping she would not. She went on standing where she was, back propped against the trunk, long legs braced on the limb; immobile, statuesque. She wore a short tunic woven of leaves, held in place by a strap looped over her shoulder; delicate sandals, also woven of leaves, interlaced halfway to her calves. He began to think she was real. Then, without warning, she twinkled out of sight.

There was no other phrase for it. She did not walk away or run away or fly away. In the strict sense of the word, she did not even disappear. She was simply there one second and not there the next second.

Strong stood still. The exertion he had expended to gain the limb and walk along it had been negligible, and yet he was sweating. He could feel sweat on his cheeks and forehead and neck; he could feel it on his chest and back, and he could feel the sweated dampness of his tree-shirt.

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his face. He took one step backward. Another. The dryad did not re-materialize. There was a cluster of leaves where she had been, a patch of sunlight.

Wright's voice sounded in his ear receiver: "Everything all right?"

Strong hesitated a moment. "Everything's fine," he said presently. "Just doing a little reconnaissance."

"How's she look?"

"She—" He realized just in time that Wright was referring to the tree. He wiped his face again, wadded up the handkerchief and replaced it in his pocket. "She's big," he said, when he could trust his voice. "Real big."

"We'll take her all right. We've had big ones before."

"Not this big we haven't."

"We'll take her anyway."

"I'll take her," Strong said.

Wright laughed. "Sure you will. But we'll be here to help you, just in case. . . . Ready to 'climb' again?"

"In a minute."

Strong hurried back to the lift. "Let her go," he said.

He had to cable-cast again at around 500 feet, and again at around 590. At about 650 the foliage thinned out temporarily and he was able to make a cast of better than one hundred and fifty feet. He sat back to enjoy the ride.

In the neighborhood of 700 feet he dropped off his tree-tent, blankets and heating unit on a wide limb, and tied them down. The sleeping was always better in the big branches. As his height increased he caught occasional glimpses of the village. Foliage below, but he could see the outermost ones, and beyond them the chemically enriched fields that stretched away to the horizon. The fields were at low ebb now—gold-stubbled with the tiny shoots of recently sown wheat, an endemic variety unequalled elsewhere in the galaxy. But by midsummer the tide would be full and the colonists would reap another of the fabulous harvests that were turning them into first-generation millionaires.

He could see the specks of housewives puttering in backyards, and gyro-cars crawling like beetles through the streets. He could see children the apparent size of tadpoles swimming in one of

the artificial lakes that were a feature of each block. All that was missing from the scene was a painter painting a house or a roofer repairing a roof. And for a good reason: *these* houses never ran down.

Or hadn't, up till now.

The wood and the carpentry that had gone into their construction was without parallel. Strong had been inside only one building—the native church that the colonists had converted into a hotel—but the owner, who was also mayor of the village, had assured him that the hotel, basically, was no more than a larger and more ornate counterpart of the other buildings. Strong had never seen such flawless woodwork before, such perfect paneling. Everything was in perfect balance, unified to a degree where it was impossible to tell where foundation and underpinning left off and floor and wall began.

Walls blended into windows and windows blended into walls. Stairways didn't simply descend: they rippled down like wood-grained rapids. As for artificial lighting, it emanated from the very wood itself.

The Advance Team, in classifying the natives as primitive, had based its conclusion largely—and perhaps stupidly, Strong thought—on the fact that they had not learned how to use metals till late in their ethnological tenure. But, the eagerness of the colonies to preserve the one remaining village (which the Department of Galactic Lands had permitted) indicated that the miracles the natives had been able to perform with wood more than compensated for the miracles they had been unable to perform with iron and bronze.

He made three more cable-casts before abandoning the lift, then, standing on the limb beneath the one over which he had made the final cast, he buckled on his climber's belt and attached the articles he would need to its snap-locks. Finally he transferred the end of the limblime from the base-bar to the snap-lock nearest his right hip.

His approximate height now was nine hundred and seventy feet, and the tree had tapered to the proportions of the long extinct

American elm. He moved in on the limb to the trunk, fashioned a safety belt out of his saddle-rope and snubbed himself into "walking" position. Then, leaning back at a forty-five degree angle, he "walked" around the trunk till he could obtain a clear view of the overhead branches.

He chose a centrally located crotch, about seventeen feet up, for the limblime, then coiled the first nine or ten feet of the line into a lineman's loop and pulled up about thirty feet of slack. He had to turn sideways on the trunk to make the throw, but he got it off perfectly, and the coil, which comprised the nucleus of the loop, soared through the crotch and unwound down to where he could easily reach the ringed end.

He returned to the limb, untied his safety belt, and climbed the double line to the crotch. Omicron Ceti 18's lighter gravity had reduced his 180 pounds Earth-weight to a feathery $157\frac{1}{2}$: he did not even draw a deep breath.

After notifying Wright, he settled himself comfortably, detached the V-shaped Timken-unit from his belt and clamped it into place in the crotch. He opened the unit and laid the limblime over the near-frictionless bearings, then closed the unit and locked it. Although he could not see what was taking place on the ground, he knew that Wright was directing the relocating of the winch, the sinking of new winch-anchors, and the substitution of the limblime for the winch-cable. The winch-cable, unneeded for the moment, would be secured to the base of the tree by means of a tree-peg.

After testing the Timken-unit by pulling the limblime back and forth several times, Strong attached the tree-tongs to the line's ringed end. Then he looked around for a good saddle-crotch. He found one presently. It was about fifteen feet above him and its location promised him excellent access to the area he was concerned with—the section ninety feet down from the top of the tree where the limbs began exceeding the one-hundred-foot limit Wright had set as maximum crest-length.

After making the throw, he "snaked" the rope down till he could reach it, and tied his saddle. The instruction manual they

gave you at treeschool had a lot to say about saddles: about the double bowline tied on the shorter length that provided you with a seat, and the tautline hitch—tied around the longer length with the slack from the bowline—that gave you maneuverability. The manual had a lot to say about saddle-technique, too: told you how to descend by putting your weight in the seat and exerting pressure on the top of the hitch; warned you always to feed the slack through the hitch after you climbed to a higher level or when you were walking in from a tonging. If you used it right, the manual said, your saddle was your best friend.

Strong didn't slip into the seat right away. He declared a ten-minute break instead. Leaning back in the limblane crotch, he tried to close his eyes; but the sun got in them, the sun and the leaves and the tree flowers, and the bright blue patches of sky.

The saddle-rope hung down like a silvery liana from the lofty crotch of his choosing, swayed gently in the morning breeze. The crotch was about twenty feet below the highest point of the tree, or over a thousand feet above the ground.

The figure was hard to assimilate. He had climbed a good many tall trees; some of them had even run as high as five hundred feet. But this one made them seem insignificant. This one was over a thousand feet high.

A thousand feet! . . .

The swaying saddle-rope took on a new meaning. He reached over and touched its knurled surface. He glanced up along its double length. Almost before he knew it, he was climbing; hand over hand at first, then intertwining his feet in the rope and letting it glide between them as he raised his body, "standing" in it while he obtained new hand-holds. Enthusiasm joined his exertion; his blood coursed warmly through his body; his senses sang. He climbed leisurely, confidently. When he reached the crotch he pulled himself into it and looked upward.

The trunk rose into a final bifurcation some ten feet above. He pressed the tiny studs that released the steel spurs contained in the insteps of his tree-boots and stood up. He placed his hands on the dark gray bark. At this height the trunk was less than a

foot in diameter and was as smooth as a woman's throat. He raised his left foot and brought it down on an angle. Hard. The spur sank deep into the wood. He put his weight on his left foot and raised his right. He sank the second spur.

He began to climb.

Even if you closed your eyes you could tell when you were nearing the top of a tree. Any tree. The crest swayed more and more as your height increased; the trunk grew smaller beneath your hands; the warmth of the sun intensified as the foliage thinned out around you; your heart beat in ever faster cadence . . .

When he reached the final crotch, Strong slipped one leg through it and looked down upon the world.

The tree was a green cloud, seen from above now rather than from below—a vast green cloud that obscured most of the village. Only the outlying houses were visible along the lacy periphery. Beyond them the "Great Wheat Sea"—as he had come to call it in his mind—rolled soundlessly away to the horizon.

"Archipelago" would have been a better metaphor than "sea." For there were "islands" wherever you looked. "Islands" of rotted villages, sometimes surmounted by the gaunt gray lighthouse of a dead tree, sometimes littered with the gray debris of a fallen one. "Islands" of storage bins built of durable steel-foil; "islands" of equipment sheds built of the same material and filled with the sowing-copters and lightweight combines the colonists had leased from the Department of Galactic Lands.

Nearer the village there were other, smaller "islands": the sewage disposal plant; the incinerator; the crematory. Finally there was the brand new "island" of the lumber mill, where the colonists hoped to salvage the wood from this tree.

In a way the tree would be a harvest in itself, for wood was dear on Omicron Ceti 18—almost as dear as it was on Earth. But they wouldn't be getting it for nothing, Strong thought; not if you figured the goodly sum they were going to have to shell out to Tree Killers, Inc. for the tree's removal.

He laughed. He had little sympathy for the colonists. He knew as well as Blueskies what they were doing to the soil, what Omi-

cron Ceti 18 would look like half a century in the future. Sometimes he hated them—

But he found it hard to hate them now. He found it difficult to hate at all, with the morning wind fluttering his tree-shirt and the morning sun fingering his face and the vast blue sky spread out around his shoulders and the whole world spread out beneath his feet.

He lit and smoked a cigarette, and it tasted good on the top of the world, in the wind and the alien sun. He smoked it down till it stung his fingers, then ground it out on the instep of his boot.

When he raised his hand there was blood on his forefinger and thumb.

At first he thought he had cut himself, but when he wiped the blood away there was no sign of a cut or even a scratch. He frowned. Could he possibly have injured his foot? He leaned forward . . . and saw the redness of his instep and the bloody, dripping spur. He leaned farther forward . . . and saw the bloody trail his spurs had left on the smooth gray trunk. Finally he realized that it wasn't his blood at all—

It was the tree's.

The foliage twinkled in the sun and the wind, and the trunk swayed lazily back and forth. And back and forth and back and forth—

Sap!

He had begun to think that the word would never assert itself, that its false synonym would pre-empt his mind forever.

Sap . . .

It didn't *have* to be transparent. If the right pigments were present, it could be any color—any color under the sun. Purple. Green. Brown. Blue. Red—

Blood-red . . .

There was no reason to assume that, simply because a certain characteristic was present in ordinary trees, it necessarily had to be present in this one. There was no arboreal law that said a tree's juice *had* to be colorless.

He began to feel better. Red sap, he thought. Wait'll I tell Wright!

But he didn't say a word about it to Wright when, a moment later, Wright contacted him.

"Almost ready?" Wright asked.

"Not—not quite. Doing a little reconnaissance."

"Quite a favorite occupation of yours this morning."

"In a way."

"Well, since you're going to keep the dryads all to yourself, I won't try to muscle in. Too high for a middle-aged treeman like myself to be climbing, anyway. The reason I called was to tell you we're knocking off for chow. I suggest you do the same."

"Will do," Strong said.

But he didn't. He had tree-rations in his pocket, but he had no appetite to go with them. Instead, he sat quietly in the crotch and smoked another cigarette, then he descended the trunk to the saddle-rope crotch. Quite a bit of the sap got on his hands and he had to wipe it off on his handkerchief.

He retracted his spurs, intertwined his feet in the middle-rope and "skinned" down to the limblime-crotch. He paused there long enough to slip into his saddle, then he "burned" down to the end of the limblime, and attached the tongs to his belt. The first one-hundred-footer was about twenty feet below him. He "burned" the rest of the way down to it, the limblime trailing behind him, and started walking out. The limb was quite large at its juncture with the trunk, but it tapered rapidly. When he judged he had covered two thirds of its length he affixed the pointed tongs into the wood, adjusting them so that when the limblime tightened they would get a firm bite on the limb.

The action had a calming effect, and when he tongued on his transmitter he was his usual tree-self, and automatically lapsed into the mock-formal mode of address he and Wright sometimes used in their tree-to-ground exchanges:

"Ready when you are, Mr. Wright."

There was a pause. Then: "You don't believe in long noonings, do you, Mr. Strong?"

"Not when there's a tree the size of this one staring me in the face."

"I'll turn on the winch. Sound off when the slack is out."

"Will do, Mr. Wright."

In its present position the limblime straggled back along the limb to the trunk, then up the trunk to the limblime-crotch. When the winch went into action it rose into a sagging arc . . . a less pronounced arc . . . a straight line. The limb quivered, creaked—

"Hold it, Mr. Wright."

He walked back to the trunk, feeding his saddle-slack through the tautline hitch. At the trunk, he put his weight into the seat and "burned" down till he was even with the underside of the limb. Then he leaned back in the saddle and drew his pistol-shaped cutter. He set the beam for ten feet and directed the muzzle at the bottom of the limb. He was about to squeeze the trigger when he caught a hint of curves and color on the periphery of his vision. He glanced out to where the limb's leaf-laden branches brushed the noonday sky—

And saw the dryad.

"We're waiting for the Word, Mr. Strong."

Strong swallowed. Sweat had run down from his forehead into his eyes. He wiped them on his shirtsleeve. He still saw the dryad.

She was half sitting, half reclining, on a bough too small to support her weight, and her wispy garment blended so flawlessly with her leafy surroundings that if it had not been for her pixy-face and golden limbs, and her gentle shock of yellow hair, he would have sworn he was not really seeing her at all; and even as it was he almost would have sworn, because her face could have been a newly opened flower, her limbs graceful patterns of golden wheat showing through the foliage, and her hair a handful of sunlight.

He wiped his eyes again. But she refused to disappear. He waved to her, feeling like a fool. She made no movement. He waved to her again, feeling even more like a fool. He tongued off his transmitter. "Get out of there!" he shouted. She paid no attention.

"What's the holdup, Strong?" Wright's impatience was evident both in his tone of voice and in his dropping of the mock-formal "Mr."

Listen, Strong said to himself: You've climbed hundreds of trees and there wasn't a single dryad in any of them. Not one. There's no such thing as a dryad. There never was such a thing. There never will be. In this tree or any other tree. And there's no more dryad out there on that limb than there's champagne in your canteen!

He forced his eyes back to the underside of the limb towards which his cutter still pointed. He forced himself to squeeze the trigger. A slit appeared in the wood; he could almost feel pain. He tongued on his transmitter. "Up," he said. The limblime twanged as it tightened; the limb sighed. He deepened the undercut. "Up," he said again. This time the limb rose perceptibly. "Now keep a steady strain, Mr. Wright," he said, and brought the invisible beam of the cutter slowly up through the wood tissue, freezing the molecular structure inch by inch. The limb rose up and back, separating from the stud. By the time he finished the cut it was hanging parallel to the trunk and was ready to be lowered.

"Take her down, Mr. Wright!"

"Will do, Mr. Strong!"

He remained where he was while the limb passed, severing the larger subsidiary branches so that there would be less chance of its hanging up. When the final section came opposite him he scrutinized it closely. But he saw no sign of a dryad.

He noticed that his hands were trembling again, and looking past them he saw something that made them tremble more: the cutter-beam had temporarily frozen the stub, but the sun was shining full upon it now, and blood was already beginning to ooze from the wound—

No, not blood. Sap. Red sap. My God, what was the matter with him? All the while he kept his eyes on the limblime so that he could notify Wright in case the limb became hung up. But the limb proved to be co-operative: it slipped smoothly through the lower branches and after a while he heard Wright say, "She's

down, Mr. Strong. I'm raising the line again." And then, in a shocked voice: "Did you cut yourself, Tom?"

"No," Strong said. "That's sap you're looking at."

"Sap! I'll be damned!" Then: "Suhre says it looks pink to him. Blueskies, though, says it's a deep crimson. What does it look like to you, Strong?"

"It looks like blood," Strong said. He swung around to the other side of the trunk, out of sight of the stub, and waited for the end of the line to come within reach. While he waited he gave the next limb down a good reconnaissance, but he saw no dryad lurking in any of its bowers. By the time he was set-up for the next cut, some of his confidence had returned and he had half forgotten about the "blood."

And then the second limb began its downward journey and he saw the new "blood" oozing from the new wound, and he was sick all over again. But not quite so sick this time: he was becoming inured.

He severed and sent four more limbs down in quick succession. He was lucky on all of them; not a single one became hung up. You *needed* luck when you de-limbed a tree from the top down rather than from the bottom up and for that reason the top-to-bottom method was never used except in rare cases such as the present one, where the nearest houses were so close that the utmost care had to be taken in removing the lower, longer limbs. As the utmost care could not be taken if overhead growth interfered with their being drawn straight back against the trunk, the easier bottom-to-top method was out for Strong.

He was able to remove eight limbs before it became necessary to move the winch to the opposite side of the tree. After the winch-shift he removed eight more. An excellent afternoon's work in any treeman's book.

At quitting time Wright made the traditional offer: "Want to come down for the night?"

Strong made the traditional refusal: "Like hell!"

"The custom of staying in a tree till it's finished shouldn't apply to a tree the size of this one," Wright said.

"Just the same, it does," Strong said. "What's for chow?"

"The mayor's sending you over a special plate. I'll send it up in the lift. In the meantime, climb in, and as soon as we change cables you can ride down as far as your tree-tent."

"Will do."

"We're going to sleep at the hotel. I'll keep my ear receiver on in case you need anything."

The mayor didn't arrive for half an hour, but the plate he brought proved to be worth waiting for. Strong had spent the time setting up his tree-tent, and he ate, now, sitting cross-legged before it. The sun had set, and the hahaha birds were wearing scarlet patterns in the foliage and screaming a raucous farewell to the day.

The air grew noticeably colder, and as soon as he finished eating he got out his heating unit and turned it on. The manufacturers of outdoor heating units took a camper's morale as well as his physical comfort into consideration. This one was shaped like a small campfire and by adjusting a dial you could make its artificial sticks glow bright yellow, deep orange, or cherry-red. Strong chose cherry-red, and the heat emanating so cheerfully from the tiny atomic batteries drove away some of his loneliness.

After a while the moons—Omicron Ceti 18 had three of them—began to rise, and their constantly changing patterns on leaf and limb and flower had a lulling effect. The tree, in its new mood, was lovely. The hahaha birds had settled down for the night, and as there were no singing insects in the vicinity, the quiet was absolute.

It grew rapidly colder. When it was so cold he could see his breath, he withdrew into his tent and pulled his "campfire" into the triangular doorway. He sat there cross-legged in cherry-red solitude. He was very tired. Beyond the fire, the limb stretched out in silver-patterned splendor, and silver-etched leaves hung immobile in the windless night. . . .

He saw her only in fragments at first: an argent length of leg, a shimmering softness of arm; the darkness where her tunic covered her body; the silvery blur of her face. Finally the fragments drew

together, and she was there in all her thin pale loveliness. She walked out of the shadows and sat down on the opposite side of the fire. Her face was much clearer now than it had been those other times—enchancing in its fairy-smallness of features and bluebird-brightness of eyes.

For a long while she did not speak, nor did he, and they sat there silently on either side of the fire, the night all around them, silver and silent and black. And then he said: *You were out there on the limb, weren't you . . . And you were in the bower, too, and leaning against the trunk.*

In a way, she said. In a way I was.

And you live here in the tree—

In a way, she said again. In a way I do. And then: Why do Earthmen kill trees?

He thought a moment. *For a variety of reasons, he said. If you're Blueskies you kill them because killing them permits you to display one of the few heritages your race bequeathed you that the white man was unable to take away—your disdain for height. And yet all the while you're killing them, your Amerind soul writhes in self-hatred, because what you're doing to other lands is essentially the same as what the white man did to yours. . . . And if you're Suhre, you kill them because you were born with the soul of an ape, and killing them fulfills you the way painting fulfills an artist, the way creating fulfills a writer, the way composing fulfills a musician.*

And if you're you?

He discovered that he could not lie: *You kill them because you never grew up, he said. You kill them because you like to have ordinary men worship you and pat you on the back and buy you drinks. Because you like to have pretty girls turn around and look at you on the street. You kill them because shrewd outfits like Tree Killers, Inc. know your immaturity and the immaturity of the hundreds of others like you, and lure you by offering to provide you with a handsome green uniform, by sending you to treeschool and steeping you in false tradition, by retaining primitive methods of tree-removal because primitive methods make you seem almost*

like a demigod to someone watching from the ground, and almost like a man to yourself.

Take us the Earthmen, she said, the little Earthmen, that spoil the vineyard; for our vineyards are in blossom.

You stole that from my mind, he said. But you said it wrong. It's 'foxes,' not 'Earthmen.'

Foxes have no frustrations. I said it right.

. . . Yes, he said, you said it right.

Now I must go. I must prepare for tomorrow. I'll be on every limb you cut. Every falling leaf will be my hand, every dying flower my face.

I'm sorry, he said.

I know, she said. But the part of you that's sorry lives only in the night. It dies with every dawn.

I'm tired, he said. I'm terribly tired. I've got to sleep.

Sleep then, little Earthman. By your little toy fire, in your little toy tent . . . Lie back, little Earthman, and cuddle up in your warm snug bed—

Sleep . . .

The Second Day

The singing of hahaha birds awakened him, and when he crawled out of his tent he saw them winging through arboreal archways and green corridors; through leaf-laced skylights, and foliated windows pink with dawn.

He stood up on the limb, stretched his arms and filled his chest with the chill morning air. He tongued on his transmitter. "What's for breakfast, Mr. Wright?"

Wright's voice came back promptly: "Flapjacks, Mr. Strong. We're at table now, stashing them away like mad. But don't worry: the mayor's wife is whipping up a whole batch just for you. . . . Sleep good?"

"Not bad."

"Glad to hear it. You've got your work cut out for you today.

"Today you'll be getting some of the big ones. Line up any good dryads yet?"

"No. Forget the dryads and bring around the flapjacks, Mr. Wright."

"Will do, Mr. Strong."

After breakfast he broke camp and returned tent, blankets and heating unit to the lift. Then he rode the lift up to where he'd left off the preceding day. He had to lower both the saddle-rope and the limblines; the saddle-rope because of its limited length, the limblines because its present crotch was too high to permit maximum leverage. When he finished, he started out on the first limb of the day.

He paced off ninety feet and knelt and affixed the tongs. Then he told Wright to take up the limblines slack. Far below him he could see houses and backyards. At the edge of the square the timber-carriers were drawn up in a long line, ready to transport the new day's harvest to the mill.

When the line was taut, he told Wright to ease off, then he walked back to the trunk and got into de-limbing position. He raised the cutter, pointed it. He touched the trigger.

I'll be on every limb—

The dream rushed back around him and for a while he could not free himself. He looked out to the limb's end where the leaf-embroidered subsidiary branches twinkled in the sun and the wind. This time he was surprised when he did *not* see a dryad.

After a long while he brought his eyes back to where they belonged, and re-aimed the cutter. *For all men kill the thing they love*, he thought, and squeezed the trigger. *By all let this be heard*. "Take her up, Mr. Wright," he said.

When the limb was being lowered he moved out of the way and severed the larger subsidiary branches as it passed. Most of them would hang up in the foliage below, but eventually they would end up on the ground as he worked his way down the tree. The end branches were too small to bother with and when they came opposite him he turned away to inspect the next limb. Just before he did so, one of the soft leaves brushed his cheek.

It was like the touch of a woman's hand. He recoiled. He wiped his cheek furiously.

His fingers came away red.

It was some time before he realized that there had been blood—no, not blood, sap—on his fingers *before* he had wiped his cheek; but he was so shaken by then that the realization did little good, and the little good it did do was cancelled when he moved back to check the limblines and saw the “blood” welling out of the new stub.

For an insane moment all he could think of was the stump of a woman's arm.

Presently he became aware of a voice in his mind. “Tom,” the voice said. “Tom! Are you all right, Tom?” It dawned on him that it was Wright's voice and that it wasn't in his mind at all, but emanating from his ear receiver.

“Yes?”

“I said, ‘Are you all right?’”

“Yes . . . I'm all right.”

“It took you long enough to answer! I wanted to tell you that the lumber mill superintendent just sent word that all the wood we've removed so far is half-rotten. He's afraid they won't be able to salvage any of it. So watch your step, and make sure your limb-line-crotches are solid.”

“The tree looks healthy enough to me,” Strong said.

“Maybe so, but don't trust it any further than you have to. It doesn't add up in more ways than one. I sent several samples of the sap to the village lab, and they say that in its crude stage—that's before it goes through the photosynthesis process—it contains an unusually high concentration of nutrients, and in its elaborated stage—that's after it goes through the photosynthesis process—it consists of twice as many carbohydrates and twice as much oxygen as even a healthy thousand-foot tree needs to sustain itself. And not only that, they say that there's no pigment present that could possibly account for the sap's unusual color. So maybe we just imagine we're seeing ‘blood.’”

"Or maybe the tree induces us to imagine we're seeing 'blood,' " Strong said.

Wright laughed. "You've been consorting with too many dryads, Mr. Strong. Watch yourself now."

"Will do," Strong said, tonguing off.

He felt better. At least he wasn't the only one who was bothered by the "blood." The next cut did not bother him nearly so much, even though the stub "bled" profusely. He "burned" down to the next limb and started out upon it. Suddenly he felt something soft beneath his foot. Glancing down, he saw that he had stepped on a flower that had fallen either from the crest or from one of the limbs he had just removed. He stooped over and picked it up. It was crushed and its stem was broken, but even dying, it somehow managed to convey a poignant suggestion of a woman's face.

He attacked the tree, hoping that action would blunt his perceptions.

He worked furiously. Sap got on his hands and stained his clothing, but he forced himself to ignore it. He forced himself to ignore the tree-flowers, too, and the leaves that sometimes caressed his face. By noon he had cut his way down past the limb where he had spent the night, and above him nearly three hundred feet of stubbed trunk rose into the foliated crest.

He made a few swift calculations: the crest represented about ninety feet; the distance from the ground to the first limb was two hundred and eighty-seven feet; he had de-limbed nearly three hundred feet. Roughly, then, he had about three hundred and fifty feet to go . . .

After a brief lunch of tree-rations, he went back to work. The sun was blistering now, and he missed the limbs and leaves that had shaded him yesterday. He had to keep moving his saddle-rope to lower and lower stub-crotches, but the length of the lower limbs made moving the limblime unnecessary. He was a little awed, despite himself, at their size. Even when you knew that the line you were using *couldn't* break, it was unnerving to watch so thin a cable pull a two- to three-hundred-foot limb from

a horizontal to a vertical position and then support it while it was being lowered to the ground.

The tree "bled" more and more as his downward progress continued. The "blood" from the upper stubs kept dripping down into the lower branches, smearing limbs and leaves and making his work a nightmare of incarnadine fingers and red-splotted clothing. Several times he came close to giving up, but each time he reminded himself that if he did not finish the job, Suhre, who had drawn the second longest blade of grass, would; and somehow the thought of Suhre's insensitive fingers manipulating the cutter beam was even more unendurable than the "blood." So he persisted and when the day was done he had less than two hundred feet to go.

He pitched his tent on the topmost lower limb, some five hundred feet down from the crest, and asked Wright to send up water, soap and towels. When Wright complied, he stripped, soaped himself thoroughly, and rinsed the soap suds away. After drying himself, he washed out his clothes in the remaining water and hung them over the campfire. He felt better. When Wright sent up his supper—another special plate prepared by the mayor's wife—he ate cross-legged before his tent, a blanket wrapped around his shoulders. By the time he finished, his clothes were dry, and he put them on. The stars came out.

He opened the thermo-cup of coffee that had accompanied his meal and smoked a cigarette between sips.

He wondered if she would come tonight.

The night grew chill. At length the first moon rose, and before long her two silvery sisters came too. Their argent radiance transformed the tree. The limb on which he sat seemed part of a huge configuration of limbs that formed the petals of a massive flower. And then he saw the stubbed and ugly trunk rising out of the flower's center and the metaphorical illusion collapsed.

But he did not turn his eyes away. He stood up instead and faced the trunk and looked up at the cruel caricature he had created. Up, up he looked, to where the crest showed dark and lustrous against the sky, as lovely as a woman's hair . . . There was a

flower tucked in her hair, he noticed; a lonely flower glowing softly in the moonlight.

He rubbed his eyes and looked again. The flower was still there. It was an unusual flower, quite unlike the others: It bloomed just above the highest crotch—the crotch where he had first seen her blood.

The moonlight grew brighter. He located the limblime-crotch up there, and followed the limblime down with his eyes to where he had secured it after the day's operations. He reached out and touched it and it felt good to his fingers, and presently he began climbing in the moonlight.

Up, up he went, his biceps knotting, his laterals swelling against his shirt. Up into moonlight, into magic. The lower branches dwindled into a silvery mass beneath him. When he came to the saddle-rope crotch, he pulled the rope free and coiled and slung it over his shoulder. He felt no tiredness, knew no shortness of breath. It wasn't until he reached the limblime-crotch that his arms became weary and his breathing rapid. He coiled a lineman's loop and threw it through a stub-crotch some fifteen feet above his head. Eight more throws brought him up to the original saddle-rope crotch. His chest was tight, and his swollen muscles throbbed with pain. He released his spurs and started up the final section of the trunk. When he reached the highest crotch he saw her sitting on an overhead bough, and the flower was her face.

She made room for him on the bough and he sat down beside her, and far below them the tree spread out like a huge upended umbrella, the lights of the village twinkling like colored raindrops along its leaf-embroidered edges. She was thinner, he saw, and paler, and there was a sadness in her eyes.

You tried to kill me, didn't you? he said, when his breath came back. *You didn't think I could make it up here.*

I knew you could make it, she said. *Tomorrow is when I'll kill you. Not tonight.*

How?

I—I don't know.

Why should you want to kill me? There are other trees—if not here, then in some other land.

For me there is only one, she said.

We always make jokes about dryads, he said. Myself and the others. It's funny though: it never occurred to any of us that if there was such a thing as a dryad, we'd be the most logical people in the galaxy for her to hate.

You don't understand, she said.

But I do understand. I know how I'd feel if I had a home of my own and somebody came around and started tearing it down.

It isn't really like that at all, she said.

Why isn't it like that? The tree is your home, isn't it? Do you live in it all alone?

. . . Yes, she said. I'm all alone.

I'm all alone, too, he said.

Not now, she said. You're not alone now.

No. Not now.

Moonlight washed down through the foliage, spattering their shoulders with silver drops. The Great Wheat Sea was silver now, instead of gold, and a dead tree in the distance showed like the silver mast of a sunken ship, its dead branches empty booms where foliage sails had fluttered, in summer sunlight and warm winds, on spring mornings when the first breeze came up, on autumn afternoons before the frosts . . .

What did a dryad do, he wondered, when her tree died?

She dies, too, she answered, before he had a chance to ask.

But why?

You wouldn't understand.

He was silent. Then: Last night I thought I dreamed you. After I awoke this morning, I was sure I dreamed you.

You had to think you dreamed me, she said. Tomorrow you'll think you dreamed me again.

No, he said.

Yes, she said. You'll think so because you have to think so. If you think otherwise you won't be able to kill the tree. You won't

be able to stand the sight of the 'blood.' You won't be able to accept yourself as sane.

Perhaps you're right.

I know I'm right, she said. Horribly right. Tomorrow you'll ask yourself how there can possibly be such a thing as a dryad, especially one that speaks English, especially one that quotes poetry out of my mind; especially one that has the power to entice me into climbing over five hundred feet, at the risk of my life, just so I can sit on a moonlit limb talking to her.

Come to think of it, how can there be? he said.

There, you see? It isn't even morning yet, and already you're beginning not to believe. You're beginning to think again that I'm nothing more than a play of light on leaves and limbs; that I'm nothing more than a romantic image out of your loneliness.

There's a way to tell, he said, and reached out to touch her. But she eluded his hand and moved farther out on the bough. He followed, and felt the bough sag beneath him.

Please don't, she said. *Please don't.* She moved farther away, so pale and thin now that he could hardly see her against the starred darkness of the sky.

I knew you weren't real, he said. *You couldn't have been real.*

She did not answer. He strained his eyes—and saw leaf and shadow and moonlight, and nothing more. He started moving back toward the trunk, and suddenly he felt the bough bend beneath him and heard the sound of fibers parting. The bough did not break all at once. Instead it bent in toward the tree and he was able, just before it snapped free, to throw both his arms around the trunk and to cling there long enough to sink his spurs.

For a long time he did not move. He listened to the diminishing swish of the bough's passage, heard the prolonged whisper of its journey through the foliage far below, the faint thud as it hit the ground.

At last he started down. The descent was unreal, seemed endless.

He crawled into the tent and pulled the campfire in after him. His tiredness buzzed in his brain like a sleepy swarm of bees. He

wanted desperately to have done with the tree. To hell with tradition, he thought. He'd finish the de-limbing, then Suhre could take over.

But he knew he was lying in his teeth; that he'd never let Suhre touch a cutter beam to so much as a single branch. Felling *this* tree was no job for an ape. Felling *this* tree was a job for a man.

Presently he fell asleep, thinking of the last limb.

The Third Day

It was the last limb that nearly got him.

Noon had arrived by the time he had severed the others, and he stopped to eat. He had hardly any appetite. The tree, limbless and graceful for the first two hundred and eighty-seven feet, stubbed and grotesque for the next six hundred and forty-five, green and symmetrical for the remaining ninety, made him sick just to look at it. Only the thought of Suhre climbing into those dying branches made it possible for him to go on. If the thing you loved had to be killed, then it were best for you yourself to do it; for of mercy could be a part of murder, certainly a lover was best qualified to bestow it.

The first limb had finally become the last limb, and extended almost five hundred incongruous feet over the square and the village. After he finished eating he started walking out on it. When he had paced off three hundred and thirty feet, he affixed the tongs. They were the largest pair the company owned, and, while light, were extremely unwieldy. But he finally got them set up the way he wanted them, and he paused a moment to rest.

The limb was narrow enough at this point for him to see over its edge. He had quite an audience: Wright and Suhre and Blueskies of course, and the timber-carrier drivers; and in addition there were hundreds of colonists, clustered in the streets beyond the roped off area, looking up with wondering faces. Somehow their presence failed to give him the gratifying thrill amateur audiences usually gave him. Instead he found himself wondering what they would do if he were to drop the limb straight down.

It would be good for at least a score of houses, and if he were to jump-cut it, it would be good for half that many more.

Abruptly he realized his apostasy and tongued on his transmitter: "Take her up, Mr. Wright."

The tightened limblime lent the effect of a suspension bridge supported by a single cable. He walked back to the trunk, and when he reached it, got into de-limbling position. He drew and aimed his cutter. As he squeezed the trigger, a flock of hahaha birds erupted from the foliage at the limb's end. "Take her up some more, Mr. Wright."

The limb groaned, rose slightly. The hahaha birds flew three times around the trunk, then soared up into the crest and out of sight. He cut again. It was the sunward side of the tree, and the sap began to ooze out of the slit and trickle down the trunk. He shuddered, cut some more. "Keep a steady strain, Mr. Wright." The limb rose, inch by inch, foot by foot. Awesomely, monstrously. Some of the others had been giants; this one dwarfed them. "A little faster, Mr. Wright. She's twisting my way."

The limb steadied, rose back, back toward the trunk. He stole a glance below. Suhre and Blueskies had finished cutting the last limb he had sent down into sections small enough for the carrier-winches to handle, and were watching him intently. Wright was standing by the tree-winch, his eyes focused on the rising limb. The square down there had a reddish cast. So had the three men's clothing.

Strong wiped his face on his stained shirtsleeve and returned his attention to the cut. He tried to concentrate on it. The limb was almost perpendicular now, and the critical moment had arrived. He wiped his face again. Lord, the sun was hot! And there was no shade to protect him. No shade whatsoever. Not a vestige, not a mote, not an iota of shade . . .

He wondered what price tree-shade would bring if there were an acute shortage of it throughout the galaxy. And how would you sell it if you had some to sell? By the cubic foot? By the temperature? By the quality?

Good morning, madam. I'm in the tree-shade business. I deal

in rare tree-shades of all kinds: in willow-shade, oak-shade, apple-tree-shade, maple-shade, to name just a few. Today I'm running a special on a most unusual kind of tree-shade newly imported from Omicron Ceti 18. It's deep, dark, cool and refreshing—just the thing to relax you after a day in the sun—and it's positively the last of its kind on the market. You may think you know your tree-shades, madam, but you have never known a tree-shade like this one. Cool winds have blown through it, birds have sung in it, dryads have frolicked in it the day long—

“Strong!”

He came out of it like a swimmer coming out of the depths of the sea. The limb was swinging darkly toward him, twisting free from the stub along the uneven line of his undercut. He could hear the loud ripping of wood tissue and the grinding sound of bark against bark. He saw the “blood.”

He tried to leap out of the way, but his legs had turned to lead and all he could do was watch the relentless approach and wait till those tons and tons of solid fiber broke completely free and descended upon him and blended his blood with their own.

He closed his eyes. *Tomorrow is when I'll kill you*, she had said. *Not tonight*. He heard the heavy *thungg* as the limblime tautened beneath the full weight of the limb, and he felt the tree shudder. But he knew no crushing impact, no scraping of smashed body against the trunk. He knew nothing but the darkness of his closed eyelids and the feeling that time had ceased to pass.

“Strong! For God's sake get out of there!”

He opened his eyes then. The limb, at the last moment, had swung the opposite way. Now it was swinging back. Life returned to his legs, and he scrambled and clawed his way around the trunk. The tree was still shuddering and he was unable to brace himself in his saddle, but he managed to cling to the bark-prominences till the shock-waves died away. Then he worked his way back around the trunk to where the limb was swinging gently back and forth on the end of the limblime.

“All right, Strong. That's all for you. I'm grounding you right now!”

Looking down, he saw Wright standing by the winch, hands on hips, gazing angrily up at him. Blueskies had taken over the winch-controls, and Suhre was buckling on his climber's belt. The limb was rapidly nearing the ground.

So I'm grounded, Strong thought.

He wondered why he didn't feel relieved. He'd wanted to be grounded, hadn't he?

He lay back in his saddle and looked up at his handiwork: at the macabre stubs and the disembodied crest. There was something beautiful about the crest, something unbearably beautiful. It was more gold than green, more like a woman's hair than limbs and leaves—

"Did you hear me, Strong? I said you were grounded!"

Suddenly he thought of Suhre climbing up into those lovely golden tresses, defiling them with his brutal hands; raping them, destroying them. If it had been Blueskies he wouldn't have cared. But Suhre!

He lowered his eyes to the limblime-crotch. The last limb had reached the ground by now, and the limblime was no longer in motion. His eyes traced its silvery length down the trunk to where it hung several feet away, and he reached out and grasped it and climbed it to the top of the stub he had just created. He slipped out of his saddle, pulled the rope down, coiled and slung it over his shoulder—

"I'm telling you for the last time, Strong!"

"To hell with you, Wright," Strong said. "This is *my* tree!"

He started up the limblime. Wright cursed him steadily for the first hundred feet, changed to a more conciliatory tone when he passed the halfway mark. Strong paid no attention. "All right, Tom," Wright said finally, "finish it then. But don't try to climb all the way to the crest. Use the lift."

"Shove the lift," Strong said.

He knew he was being unreasonable, but he didn't care. He wanted to climb; he wanted to use his strength; he wanted to hurt his body; he wanted to know pain. He began to know it some two

hundred feet down from the limblime-crotch. By the time he reached the crotch he knew it well. But not as well as he wanted to know it, and, without pausing, he coiled a lineman's loop, threw it through an overhead stub-crotch, and continued his ascent. It took him three more throws to make the first crest-limb, and he pulled himself gratefully into leaf-sweet coolness. His muscles screamed and his lungs burned and his throat felt like caked mud.

When some of his strength returned he drank sparingly from his canteen, then he lay quietly in the coolness, not thinking, not moving, not feeling. Vaguely he heard Wright's voice—"You're a damned fool, but you're a good treeman, Mr. Strong!" But he was too exhausted to answer.

Gradually the rest of his strength returned, and he stood up on the limb and smoked a cigarette. He looked up into the foliage, located his original saddle-rope crotch, and threw for it. From the crotch he began a systematic scrutiny of the crest. He didn't really expect to find her; but before he made the first topping he had to *know* that she wasn't there.

Hahaha birds eyed him with half-moon eyes. Tree-flowers bloomed in bowers. Sun-dappled leaves quivered in a little breeze.

He wanted to call out to her, but he didn't know her name. If she had a name. Funny he'd never thought to ask her. He stared at unusual twists of limbs, at unique patterns of leaves. He looked long at tree-flowers. If she was not here, she was nowhere—

Unless, during the night, she had left the tree and hidden herself in one of the vacated houses. But he did not think she had. If she was real and not his fancy, she would never leave her tree; and if she wasn't real and was his fancy, she *couldn't* leave her tree.

Apparently she was neither: the crest was empty—empty of her flower-face, her leafy tunic, her wheat-hued length of leg and arm; her sunny hair. He sighed. He didn't know whether to be relieved or disappointed. He had dreaded finding her because if she'd been in the crest, he wouldn't have known what to do. But now he knew that he had dreaded *not* finding her, too.

"What are you doing up there, Mr. Strong? Saying goodby to your dryad?"

Startled, he looked down into the square. Wright and Suhre and Blueskies were a trio of almost indistinguishable specks. "Just looking her over, Mr. Wright," he said. "The crest, I mean. There's about ninety feet of her: think you can handle that much all at once?"

"I'll take a chance, Mr. Strong. But I want the rest in fifty-foot sections, as long as the diameter of the trunk permits."

"Stand by then, Mr. Wright."

The crest, when it fell, seemed to bow goodby to the sky. Hahaha birds erupted from it, streaked in a scarlet haze toward the horizon. It floated down to the ground like a green cloud, and the swish of its leaves was like the pattering of a thousand summer raindrops.

The tree shook like the shoulders of a woman sobbing.

"Well done, Mr. Strong," Wright said presently. "Now as nearly as I can estimate, you can get about eleven fifty-footers before the increasing diameter of the trunk rules them out. Then you'll have to take two one hundred-footers. If you drop them right they shouldn't give us any trouble. That'll leave some two hundred feet for the base-cut, and you'll have to fell it so that the last fifty feet comes down in one of the village streets; we'll figure that out when you get down here. So in all, then, you've got fourteen more cuts to make. Think you can finish up today?"

Strong looked at his watch. "I doubt it, Mr. Wright."

"If you can, fine. If you can't, we've got all day tomorrow. Just don't take any chances, Mr. Strong."

The first fifty-footer nosed into the black soil of the square, paused a moment, then toppled on its side. The second followed in its wake—

And the third and the fourth—

It was funny, Strong thought, the way physical activity kept everything sane and in place. He found it hard to believe now that less than half an hour ago he had been looking for a dryad. That less than twenty-four hours ago he had been talking to one . . .

And the fifth and the sixth—

On the seventh, his pace began to slow. He was nearing the half-way mark and the diameter of the trunk had increased to nearly thirty feet. Snubbing himself to it was no longer possible: to get into topping position he had to drive tree-pegs and run his improvised safety-belts through the slot in their end. But the slower pace gave Suhre and Blueskies a chance to cut the increasingly larger sections into suitable dimensions for the carriers. They had fallen behind; now they were beginning to catch up. The colonists, according to Wright, had given up hope of salvaging the wood and were piling it in a cleared area well away from the mill, preparatory to burning it.

Earlier in the afternoon a wind had sprung up. Now it began to die. The sun grew hotter; the tree "bled" more and more. Strong kept glancing down into the square. With its red-tinted grass and stub-gored sod, it had some of the aspects of a charnel house; but he was hungry for the feel of earth beneath his feet, and even "blood"-stained ground looked good to him.

He squinted repeatedly at the sun. He'd been in the tree nearly three days now, and did not relish spending another night in its branches. Or rather, in its stubs. But he had to admit, after he finished the final fifty-footer, that he was going to have to. By then the sun was almost out of sight beyond the Great Wheat Sea, and he knew he couldn't possibly drop even the first hundred-footer before darkness fell.

The lowest stub, upon which he now stood, was roomy enough for twenty tree-tents. Wright cable-cast over it (the lift had been lowered earlier in the afternoon, and the winch-cable reeled in), and sent up his supplies and supper. Supper turned out to be another of the mayor's special plates. After setting up his tree-tent Strong picked at the food indifferently; his appetite of yesterday was gone.

He was so tired that he didn't even wash—though Wright had sent up soap and water, too—and when he finished eating, he lay back on the coarse bark and watched the silver rising of the moons

and the pale whispering into life of the stars. This time when she came, she tiptoed up and sat down beside him and gazed into his face with her blue sad eyes. The whiteness of her skin shocked him, and the thinness of her cheeks made him want to cry.

I looked for you this morning, he said. I couldn't find you. Where do you go when you disappear?

Nowhere, she said.

But you must go somewhere.

You don't understand, she said.

No, he said. I guess I don't. I guess I never will.

Yes you will, she said. Tomorrow you'll understand.

Tomorrow will be too late.

Tonight is too late. Yesterday was too late. It was too late before you even climbed into the tree.

Tell me, he said. Are you a member of the race that built the village?

In a way, she said.

How old are you?

I don't know, she said.

Did you help to build the village?

I built the village alone.

Now you're lying, he said.

I never lie, she said.

What happened to the original race?

They grew up. They ceased to be simple. They became complex and sophisticated, civilized. And as they became civilized, they began ridiculing the customs of the ancestors as being all ignorance and superstition, and they set up new customs. They made things of iron and bronze, and it took them less than one hundred years to destroy an ecological balance that not only had helped to keep them alive but had supplied them with a reason to live—a reason so strong that it was almost a life-force. When they discovered what they had done, they were horrified; but they made the discovery too late.

And so they died?

You've seen their villages.

Yes, I've seen their villages, he said. And I've read in the Advance Team's report about the death-caves in the northern barrens into which they crawled with their children to die. But what about this village? They could have saved this one in the same way we are by removing the tree.

She shook her head. You still don't understand, she said. In order to receive, one must also give: that was the law they broke. Some of them broke it sooner than others, but eventually all of them broke it and had to pay the penalty.

You're right, he said. I don't understand.

Tomorrow you will. Tomorrow everything will be clear.

Last night you tried to kill me, he said. Why?

I didn't try to kill you. You tried to kill yourself. Today was when I tried to kill you.

With the limb?

With the limb.

But how?

It doesn't matter. All that matters is, I didn't. Couldn't.

Where will you go tomorrow?

Why should you care where I go?

I do.

You couldn't possibly be in love with me—

How do you know I couldn't be?

Because— Because—

Because I don't think you're real?

You don't, do you? she said.

I don't know what to think, he said. Sometimes I think you are, sometimes I think you aren't.

I'm as real as you are, she said. Though in a different way.

He reached up, abruptly, and touched her face. Her skin was soft and cold. As cold as moonlight, as soft as a flower. It wavered before his eyes; her whole body wavered. He sat up, turned toward her. She was light and shadow, leaf and flower; the scent of summer, the breath of night. He heard her voice. It was so faint he could hardly make out her words: *You shouldn't have done that. You should have accepted me for what I was. Now*

you've spoiled it. Now we must spend our last night together, alone.

So you weren't real after all, he said. You were never real.
No answer.

But if you weren't real, I must have imagined you, he said. And if I imagined you, how could you tell me things I didn't know?

No answer.

He said: You make what I'm doing seem like a crime. But it isn't a crime. When a tree becomes a menace to a community, it should be removed.

No answer.

Just the same, I'd give anything if it didn't have to be this way, he said.

Silence.

Anything at all—

The space beside him remained empty. He turned, finally, and crawled into his tent and drew his campfire in after him. His tiredness had turned him numb. He fumbled with his blankets with numb fingers, wrapped them around his numb body. He drew up his numb knees and hugged them with his numb arms.

"Anything at all," he murmured. "Anything at all . . ."

The Fourth Day

Sunlight seeping through the tent-wall awoke him. He kicked free of his blankets and crawled out into the morning.

He saw no scarlet winging of hahaha birds; he heard no morning birdsong. The tree was silent in the sunlight. Empty. Dead.

No, not quite dead. A cluster of leaves and flowers grew green and white and lovely by the entrance of the tent. He could not bear to look at them.

He stood up on the stub and breathed deeply of the morning air. It was a gentle morning. Mist was rising from the Great Wheat Sea and a scattering of cirrus clouds hung in the bright blue sky

like new-washed laundry. He walked to the end of the stub and looked down. Wright was oiling the winch. Suhre was cutting up the last fifty-footer. Blueskies was nowhere in sight.

"Why didn't you wake me, Mr. Wright?"

Wright looked up, located his face. "Thought you could stand a few extra winks, Mr. Strong."

"You thought correctly. . . Where's the Amerind?"

"The buffalo caught up to him again. He's drowning them at the hotel bar."

A two-wheeled gyro-car pulled into the square and a plump man, carrying a basket, got out. The mayor, Strong thought. Breakfast. He waved, and the mayor waved back.

The contents of the basket proved to be ham and eggs and coffee. Strong ate hurriedly, then collapsed his tent, folded it, and sent it down on the lift along with his blankets and campfire. He got ready for the first cut. It would be considerably less than one hundred feet because the stub was centered on the three-hundred-foot mark. It came off perfectly, and he "burned" down in his saddle for the second. This one would have to go at least one hundred and twenty feet in order to leave the maximum of two hundred for the base-cut. He estimated the distance carefully.

After notching the section on the side Wright wanted the fall, he worked his way around toward the opposite side of the trunk, playing out his saddle-rope as he went. The bark-prominences and the fissures made the operation relatively simple, and he even paused now and then to look down into the square. The square was closer now than it had been for days, and it and the houses and the streets looked strange, from his new perspective, as did the hordes of colonists watching from beyond the vacated area.

Wright informed him when he was directly opposite the center of the notch, and he drove a tree-peg. It took but a moment to transfer his saddle from the overhead stub-crotch to the peg-slot. He leaned back in the seat, braced his feet against one of the bark-prominences, and began the cut.

He began it gingerly. He was working with thousands of tons

and the least miscalculation could bring those thousands of tons down upon him. The trouble was, he had to cut *above* the tree-peg, and to do so he had to hold the cutter at arm's length above his head, at the same time keeping the line of the beam at right angles to the trunk.

It was a tricky operation and demanded good eyesight and excellent judgment. Ordinarily Strong possessed both, but today he was tired. He didn't have any idea quite how tired till he heard Wright shout.

It was the bark-prominences that had thrown him off. He realized that instantly. Instead of using the whole of the visible trunk in estimating his beam-angle, he had used only a limited area and the prominences in that area weren't true. However, the realization did him no good: the one hundred and twenty foot section was already toppling toward him and there was nothing he could do to stop it.

It was like clinging to the face of a cliff and seeing the entire top section start falling outward in a slow but inevitable arc that would eventually enclose him between earthen jaws. The jaws were wood, in this case, but the analogy was basically accurate: the fate of a gnat squeezed between two handfuls of earth differs but little from the fate of a gnat squeezed between two sticks.

He felt nothing; terror had not yet had time to take root. He watched wonderingly while the falling section blotted out the sun and turned the fissures between the bark-prominences into dark caves. He listened wonderingly to a voice that he was sure was emanating from his own brain, but which could not be emanating from his own brain because it was too sweet and poignant to have his mind as a source-place.

Into the fissure. Hurry!

He could not see her; he wasn't even sure it was her voice. But his body responded, squeezing itself into the nearest fissure, squirming back as far as it could go. Another second and the effort would have been wasted, for the moment his shoulder touched the backwall of the fissure, the upended butt of the sec-

tion came thundering down tearing his tree-peg out by the steel roots; roaring, crashing, splintering, finally passing from sight.

The fissure filled with sunlight. Except for himself, it was empty.

Presently he heard the heavy *thud* as the section struck the ground. Another, more prolonged, *thud* followed, and he knew that it had landed head-on and then fallen lengthwise into the square. He waited almost hopefully for the sounds of splintering wood and breaking glass and the other sundry sounds houses make when a heavy object drops upon them, but he heard nothing.

The fissure had no floor. He was holding himself in position by pressing his knees against one wall while pressing his back against the other. Now he inched his way to the mouth and peered down into the square.

The section had landed on an angle, plowing a huge furrow in the earth, gouging out ancient burial artifacts and bits of human bones. Afterwards it had toppled back away from the nearer houses. Wright and Suhre were running up and down its length, looking for his mangled body. He heard himself laughing. He knew it was himself; not because he recognized his voice, but because there was no one else in the fissure. He laughed till his chest hurt and he could barely breathe, till there was no more hysteria left in him. Then, when his breath came back, he tongued on his transmitter and said: "Are you looking for me, Mr. Wright?"

Wright went rigid. He turned, looked up. Suhre followed suit. For a moment no one said a word. At last Wright raised his arm and wiped his face on his shirtsleeve. "All I got to say, Mr. Strong," he said, "is that you got a good dryad watching over you." And then: "Come down, man. Come down. I want to shake your hand!"

It got through to Strong finally that he *could* go down; that his work, except for the base-cut, was finished.

He pulled up his dangling tree-peg, re-drove it, and "burned" down the saddle-rope in fifty-foot spurts. He cut the last spurt

short, slipped out of the seat, and leaped the final few feet to the ground.

The sun was at meridian. He had been in the tree three and one half days.

Wright came up and shook his hand. So did Suhre. At length he became aware that he was shaking hands with a third party. The mayor had returned, bringing special plates for everybody this time plus a set of collapsible tables and chairs.

"We'll never forget you, my boy," he was saying, his dew-lapped jaws jiggling. "We'll never forget you! I called a special meeting of the board last night on your behalf, and we voted unanimously to erect a statue of you in the square after the stump had been burned out. We're going to inscribe the words, 'The Man Who Saved Our Beloved Village' at its base. Quite a heroic inscription, don't you think? But it's no more than you deserve. However, to-day—tonight, I want to express my gratitude in a more tangible way: I want you—and your friends, too, of course—to be my guests at the hotel. Everything will be on the house."

Suhre said: "I've been waiting to hear those words!" Wright said: "We'll be there." Strong didn't say anything. Finally the mayor released his hand, and the four of them sat down to dinner. Steaks brought all the way from the southern hemisphere; mushrooms imported from Omicron Ceti 14; tossed salad; green peas; fresh bread; apricot pie; coffee.

Strong forced the food down. He had no appetite. What he really wanted was a drink. Many drinks. But it was too soon. He still had one more cut to go. Then he could drink. Then he could help Blueskies drown the buffalo. On the house. "The Man Who Saved Our Beloved Village." Fill her up, bartender. Fill her up again. *I did not wear my scarlet cloak*, bartender. *For blood and wine are red*, bartender. *And blood and wine were on my hands when they found me with the dead, the poor dead woman whom I loved and murdered in her bed . . .*

The mayor had an excellent appetite. His beloved village was safe now. Now he could sit by his fire and count his credits in

peace. He wouldn't have to worry any more about the tree. Strong felt like the little Dutch boy who had thrust his hand in the hole in the dike and saved the burghers' houses from the sea.

He was glad when the meal was over, glad when Wright leaned back in his chair. "What do you say, Mr. Strong?"

"I say let's get it over with, Mr. Wright."

They got up. The mayor took his table and chairs, climbed in his gyro-car and joined the other colonists beyond the danger area. The village sparkled in the sunlight. The streets looked as though they had just been scrubbed, and the houses, with their elaborate décor, looked like gingerbread fresh from the oven. Strong stopped feeling like the little Dutch boy and started to feel like Jack the Giant-Killer. It was time to chop down the bean-stalk.

He took up his position at the base of the trunk and began the notch. Wright and Suhre stood just behind him. He cut the notch carefully so that the trunk could not fail to fall in the direction Wright had designated. He cut it deep and true, and when he finished he knew the trunk would obey him. He walked around to its opposite side, Wright and Suhre following. No one spoke. It felt strange to be walking on solid ground. He kept expecting to feel the tug of the saddle-seat against his buttocks, the drag of the limblime on his belt. The tips of his boots were red, he noticed. Red from the "blood"-drenched grass.

He took up his final position and raised his cutter. He squeezed the trigger. *The coward does it with a kiss*, he thought, *the treeman with a sword*. A slit appeared in the fissured trunk. Its edges began to redden. *The most modern of swords, manufactured in New America, Venus, and guaranteed never to become dull—*

Never to show mercy.

"Blood" ran down the bark, discoloring the grass. The invisible blade of the cutter swung back and forth and back and forth. The two-hundred-foot stub that once had been a tall proud tree shuddered. Slowly it began its passage to the ground.

There was the prolonged swishing sound of the descent; the

thick and thunderous sound of the descent's end; the quick brief trembling of the earth . . .

The surface of the massive stump grew bright red in the sunlight. Strong let the cutter fall to the ground. He circled the stump, stumbling now and then, till he came to the building-high length of the fallen stub. It had dropped just as he had wanted it to, its uppermost section landing neatly between two of the rows of houses. But he did not care about the houses any more. He had never cared about them really. He continued walking, gazing steadfastly at the ground. He found her presently, near the edge of the square. He had known he would find her if he looked hard enough. She was sunlight and meadow flower, a transient pattern of grass. He could not see all of her—only her waist and breasts and arms and lovely dying face. The rest of her was crushed beneath the stub: her hips, her legs; her small, leaf-sandaled feet—

"Forgive me," he said, and saw her smile and nod her head, and saw her die; and the grass come back, and the meadow flower, and the sun.

Epilogue

The man who had saved the beloved village placed his elbows on the bar that had once been an altar, in the hotel that had once been a church. "We've come to drown the buffalo, mayor," he said.

The mayor, who in honor of the occasion had taken over the duties of bartender, frowned.

"He means," Wright said, "that we'd like a round of drinks."

The mayor beamed. "May I recommend," he said, "our finest Martian bourbon, distilled from the choicest maize of the *Mare Erythraeum*?"

"Bring it forth from your cob-webbed crypt and we'll try it," Strong said.

"It's an excellent bourbon," Blueskies said, "but it won't drown buffalo. I've been on it all afternoon."

"You and your damned buffalo!" Suhre said.

The mayor set glasses before Wright and Strong and Suhre, and filled them from a golden bottle. "My glass is empty also," Blueskies said, and the mayor filled his, too.

The townfolk, out of deference, let the treemen have the bar to themselves. However, all the tables were occupied, and every so often one of the colonists would stand up and propose a toast, to Strong in particular, or to the treemen in general, and all of them—men and women alike—would stand up and cheer and empty their glasses.

"I wish they'd go home," Strong said. "I wish they'd leave me alone."

"They can't leave you alone," Wright said. "You're their new culture-god."

"Another bourbon, Mr. Strong?" the mayor asked.

"Many more," Strong said. "To drug the memory of this insolence—"

"What insolence, Mr. Strong?"

"Yours for one, you little earthman, you. You fat contemptible little earthman!"

"You could see them coming out of the horizon beneath the cloud of the dust their hooves threw up," Blueskies said, "and they were beautiful in their shaggy majesty and as dark and magnificent as death."

"Take us the earthmen," Strong said, "the fat little earthmen, that spoil the vineyard; for our vineyards are in blossom—"

"Tom!" Wright said.

"May I take this opportunity to tender my resignation, Mr. Wright? I shall never murder another tree. I am finished with your putrescent profession!"

"Why, Tom?"

Strong did not answer. He looked down at his hands. Some of his bourbon had spilled on the bar and his fingers were wet and sticky. He raised his eyes to the backbar. The backbar was the rear wall of the reconverted native church and contained a number of exquisitely carved niches formerly used to display religious

articles. The niches contained bottles of wine and whiskey now—all save one. That one contained a little doll.

Strong felt a throbbing in his temples. He pointed to the niche. "What—what kind of a doll is that, mayor?"

The mayor faced the backbar. "Oh, that. It's one of the carved figurines which the early natives used to keep over their hearths to protect their houses." He took the figurine out of the niche, carried it over to where Strong was standing, and set it on the bar. "Remarkable workmanship, don't you think, Mr. Strong? . . . Mr. Strong?"

Strong was staring at the figurine—at its graceful arms and long slim legs; at its small breasts and slender throat; at its pixy-face and yellow hair; at the green garment of delicately carved leaves adorning it.

"The correct term is 'fetish,' I believe," the mayor went on. "It was made in the image of their principal goddess. From the little we know of them, it appears that the early natives believed in her so fanatically that some of them even claimed to have seen her."

"In the tree?"

"Sometimes."

Strong reached out and touched the figurine. He picked it up tenderly. Its base was wet from the liquor he had spilled on the bar. "Then—then she must have been the Goddess of the Tree."

"Oh, no, Mr. Strong. She was the Goddess of the Hearth. The Home. The Advance Team was wrong in assuming that the trees were religious symbols. We've lived here long enough to understand how the natives really felt. It was their houses that they worshipped, not the trees."

"Goddess of the Hearth?" Strong said. "The Home? . . . Then what was she doing in the tree?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Strong?"

"In the tree. I saw her in the tree."

"You're joking, Mr. Strong!"

"The hell I'm joking! She *was* the tree!" Strong brought his

fist down on the bar as hard as he could. "She *was* the tree and I killed her!"

"Get hold of yourself, Tom," Wright said. "Everybody's staring at you."

"I killed her inch by inch, foot by foot. I cut her down arm by arm, leg by leg. I *murdered* her!" Strong paused. Something was wrong. Something that should have happened had failed to happen. Then he saw the mayor staring at his fist and he realized what the wrongness was.

When his fist had struck the bar, he should have felt pain. He had not. He saw why: his fist had not rebounded from the wood—it had sunk into the wood. It was as though the wood were rotten.

He raised his fist slowly. A decayed smell arose from the ragged dent it had made. The wood *was* rotten.

Goddess of the Hearth. The Home. The Village.

He swung away from the bar and made his way across the table-crowded floor to the street-wall. He threw his fist as hard as he could at the polished, exquisitely grained wood.

His fist went through the wall.

He gripped the lower edge of the hole he had made, and pulled. A whole section of the wall broke free, fell to the floor. The stench of decay filled the room.

The colonists were watching with horrified eyes. Strong faced them. "Your whole hotel is rotting away," he said. "Your whole goddam village!"

He began to laugh. Wright came over and slapped his face. "Snap out of it, Tom!"

His laughter died. He took a deep breath, expelled it. "But don't you see it, Wright? The tree? The village? What does a species of tree capable of growing to that size need to perpetuate its growth and to maintain itself after it has attained its growth? Nourishment. Tons and tons of nourishment. And what kind of soil! Soil enriched by the wastes and the dead bodies, and irrigated by the artificial lakes and reservoirs that only a large community of human beings can provide.

"So what does such species of tree do? Over a period of cen-

turies, maybe even millenia, it learns how to lure human beings to its side. How? By growing houses. That's right. By growing houses right out of its roots, lovely houses that human beings can't resist living in. You see it now, don't you, Wright? You see now, don't you, why the crude sap carried more nutrients than the tree needed, why the elaborated sap was so rich in oxygen and carbohydrates. The tree was trying to sustain more than just itself; it was trying to sustain the village, too. But it couldn't any longer—thanks to the eternal selfishness and the eternal stupidity of man.”

Wright looked stunned. Strong took his arm and they walked back to the bar together. The faces of the colonists were like gray clay. The mayor was still staring at the ragged dent in the bar. “Aren't you going to buy the man who saved your beloved village another drink?” Strong asked.

The mayor did not move.

Wright said: “The ancients must have known about the ecological balance—and converted their knowledge to superstition. And it was the superstition, not the knowledge, that got handed down from generation to generation. When the race matured they did the same thing all races do when they grow up too fast: they completely disregarded superstition. And when they eventually learned how to use metals, they built sewage disposal systems and incinerators and crematories. They spurned whatever systems the trees had provided and they turned the ancient burial grounds at the trees' bases into community squares. They upset the ecological balance.”

Strong said: “Without knowing it. And when they finally found out, it was too late to restore it. The trees had already begun to die, and when the first tree *did* die and the first village started to rot away, they were appalled. Probably the love of their houses had been inbred in them so strongly that without their houses they were lost. And apparently they couldn't even bear to see their houses die. That's why they migrated to the northern barrens. That's why they either starved or froze to death in the death-caves, or committed mass-suicide . . .”

Blueskies said: “Fifty million of them there were, the great,

shaggy, magnificent beasts, dwelling on the fertile plains where now the Great North American Desert lies. And the grass that sustained them was green, and they returned the grass to the earth in their dung, and the grass grew green again. Fifty million! And when the white men finished the slaughter, five hundred remained."

Wright said: "This must have been one of the last villages to go 'modern.' Even so, the tree must have been dying for years before the colonists came. That's why the village is rotting away so fast now."

Strong said: "The tree's death accelerated the deterioration-process. There probably won't be a house standing in another month . . . But the tree might have lived another hundred years if they hadn't been so anxious to preserve their damned real estate. It takes a long time for a tree the size of that one to die . . . And the color of the sap—I think I understand that now, too. Our consciences provided the pigment . . . In a way, though, I think she . . . I think it wanted to die."

Wright said: "The colonists will still exploit the land. But they'll have to live in mud huts while they're doing it."

Strong said: "Perhaps I performed an act of mercy—"

Suhre said: "What're you two talking about?"

Blueskies said: "Fifty million of them. *Fifty million!*"

THE HIGH CRUSADE

By Poul Anderson

In those far-off days when people thought the earth was flat and the sun revolved around it, the good folk of Ansby, a little town in Lincolnshire, England, ruled by Sir Roger de Tourneville, were startled out of their peaceful life one day by the arrival of a fantastic spaceship—one manned by weird little men with blue scales, long pointed ears, and short tails. At the time, Sir Roger had been about to depart with his knights and archers on a crusade to the Holy Land, but when the spacemen attacked the town with powerful flame throwers, his plans were drastically changed.

What happens when Sir Roger conquers the invaders, and crusades in the galaxy for the establishment of Christianity with an alien as pilot of his ship, makes an absorbing and witty tale, told by a master of science fiction.

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